

Re-thinking tourism: degrowth and equity rights in developing community-centric tourism

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Abstract

Neoliberalism and the growth trajectory sought by developing countries with the aspiration of achieving western levels of consumption, impedes notions of equity, justice and well-being for all. Specifically, a commitment to capitalism has engulfed discussions on behavioural change necessary to progress sustainability. Critical explorations concerning tourists, who are not always ‘rational decision-makers’, and which question the ability of the industry to self-regulate are urgently needed in scholarly work. In this chapter we argue that it is necessary to re-frame tourism through a degrowth strategy. Our analysis builds on our previous work redefining tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, Carnicelli, Krolkowski, Wijesinghe & Boluk, 2019) and the importance of placing the rights of local communities above the rights of tourists for holidays, and the rights of tourism corporations to generate profits. Drawing on the overtourism and ‘last chance’ tourism literature we consider the need to pursue a degrowth and community centric tourism pathway. We highlight a number of examples centering on airlines (Air New Zealand, Air France, KLM) illustrating the lack of responsibility presented by tourism corporates in responding to sustainability concerns. As well as some of the promising work which has the potential to contribute to community-centred sustainability. We offer proposals for action and provide illustrative examples of Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019) community-centred tourism framework. We support the framework as a mechanism for degrowing tourism, and one which offers the industry and other tourism stakeholders a reconciliatory approach towards a more equitable and sustainable tourism that may have a future.

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1.0 Introduction

The current way tourism is packaged and practiced is unsustainable. Glossy magazines, brochures and advertisements on television and social media, prioritising images of unflawed, pristine beaches and often sparsely populated and glistening aqua coloured seascapes, portray only one side of the tourism narrative. Images reflecting marginalised local populations at tourism destinations, their stories including how their lives have been and continue to be affected by tourists and more broadly the tourism industry are absent from tourism promotional materials. Furthermore, if and/or how local people would like to invite tourists into their communities in which they live are absent from tourism narratives (Higgins-Desbiolles, Carnicelli, Krolkowski, Wijesinghe & Boluk, 2019). In November 2019, 11,258 scientists unequivocally argued that the earth faces a climate emergency (Ripple, Wolf, Newsome, Barnard & Moomaw, 2020) and, unfortunately, the tourism industry is a culprit. The authors capture the breadth of human activities that have had a detrimental effect on the earth since 1979. Air transportation was identified as one of fifteen indicators significantly contributing to climate change (Ripple et al., 2020). Importantly, it is marginalised populations who often suffer the impacts of the predatory practices of tourism. The neoliberal emphasis on production and consumption has created an industry that fails to prioritise the rights of communities where tourism takes place and ignores its planetary impacts.

Contemporary mainstream magazine and newspaper articles have drawn attention to the concerns caused by tourism and scholarly research by scientists and social scientists alike. McKibben (2018), in *The Guardian* for example, stated, “we have to realize that global warming stems from the fact that we are a world without atmospheric borders, where the people who have done the least to cause the problem feel its horrors first and hardest”. Furthermore, headlines signalling Ripple et al.’s (2020) evidence of a climate emergency swept the globe on November 6, 2019 one day after the *BioScience* journal article publication. Clearly, the scientists involved in the study highlight that the “climate crisis is closely linked to excessive consumption of the wealthy lifestyle [and] the most affluent countries are mainly responsible for the historical GHG [Greenhouse Gas] emissions and generally have the greatest per capita emissions” (Ripple et al., 2020, p. 8). Klinsky, et al. (2017) argue that a consideration of equity and justice are essential to our ability to understand the dynamics of political claims, actions and trade-offs and more academic research is needed in this area. Hence, the mobility of the privileged and (in)equity rights of host communities are significant issues affecting social sustainability. We agree with Ripple et al. (2020) who put forth that all stakeholders must realign their priorities in order to alleviate climate change if we are really concerned with promoting justice and well-being for all.

The tourism industry supports the mechanics of neoliberalism (Wearing & Wearing, 2006; Mosedale, 2016; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018a) which is not conducive with supporting long-term sustainability (Boluk, Cavaliere & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2019). As such, an emphasis on capitalism concentrating on production and consumption is prioritised above the needs, wants or desires of local communities. Discussions about defining the limits to growth and responsibilities in tourism and how to achieve 'sustainable tourism' within a 'sustainable development' framework has a long history starting with *The Limits to Growth* report (Meadows, Meadows, Randers & Behrens, 1972) and *the Brundtland Report* (World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), 1987). Sharpley (2000, p. 14) investigated the tension between the concept of 'sustainable tourism' with 'sustainable development' stating that "sustainable tourism does not appear to be consistent with the developmental aspects of sustainable development".

To the frustration of many scholars, the fact that tourism is employed as an economic activity and embedded as a component of capitalism has obstructed progress to achieve sustainable tourism outcomes. In fact, tourists are sought in the competitive tourism marketplace to drive the endless growth that is the key to contemporary politics in many countries. Obrador (2017, p. 208) states "the advancement of aggressive forms of tourism development has met an increasingly radicalised response. New forms of activism have emerged which advocate the need for 'degrowing' tourism economies and restricting tourist arrivals, prompting a shift in public discourse back to issues of saturation". The saturation point of tourism in certain destinations conflicts directly with the necessity of growth, as well as with the capitalist and consumerist modus-operandi of westernised societies. Specifically, Boluk et al. (2019, p. 857) highlight a growing number of destinations that offer 'extreme examples' (the Galapagos Islands, Machu Picchu, Mount Everest, Majorca, Barcelona, and Venice) feeling the impact of overtourism, signalling an imperative to more closely regulate tourism impacts given the failure of the laissez faire approach to tourism management.

The growth trajectory sought by developing countries with the aspiration of attaining western levels of consumption mutually challenges notions of equity and growth in tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). Hall (2009a) reminds us that it is imperative to consider the environmental damages that may occur to tourism destinations if equity for all is to be implemented in tourism and travel. However, Wheeler's (1993) critique of sustainability in tourism suggests that assuming real responsibility is currently absent. Specifically, because of a commitment to capitalism, growth has superseded discussions of necessary sacrifice, how we must change our behaviour, and act differently in order to respond to sustainability imperatives (Wheeler, 1993). Wheeler (1993) dismissed some of the attempts to 'curb' unsustainable practices as superficial greenwashing.

Building on Wheeler's (1993) concern, Mihalic (2016) argued that the sustainability discourse is not enough anymore unless integrated with responsible practice, but the discourse of her concepts still places a central focus on the tourist. It is this discourse and focus we aim to challenge.

Hall (2009a, p. 53) was one of the first to link tourism sustainability to the larger degrowth movement, suggesting that "sustainable tourism development is tourism development without growth in throughput of matter and energy beyond regenerative and absorptive capacities". Thus, degrowth thinking offers a fundamental challenge to tourism processes, as it questions the assumptions which have been behind the continual expansion of the industry since the post-war period. "To seriously pursue degrowth at both global and most national levels would, therefore, likely require drastic transformation of the tourism industry and its metabolism" (Fletcher, Murray Mas, Blanco-Romero & Blázquez-Salom, 2019, p. 1746). Saarinen's (2014, p. 1) work examining the complexity surrounding conceptual dimensions of sustainable tourism concluded that "there is a need to re-frame i.e., rescale and decentralize tourism in policy frameworks and practices aiming towards sustainability" advocating for more host-friendly practices. As such, we believe that fairness and justice are key facets to achieving degrowth that is socially sustainable (Muraca, 2012). In this chapter we argue that it is necessary to re-frame tourism through a degrowth strategy, building on our previous work redefining tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019) we continue to argue the imperative to place the rights of local communities above the rights of tourists for holidays and the rights of tourism corporations to make profits. Specifically, we will highlight a number of examples illustrating the lack of responsibility presented by tourism corporates in responding to sustainability concerns. Drawing on the overtourism and 'last chance' tourism literature we consider the importance of pursuing a degrowth and community centric tourism pathway.

2.0 Current Issues in Sustainable tourism

2.1 Overtourism and Last Chance Tourism

Overtourism refers to "the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or visitors in a negative way" (UNWTO, 2018, p. 4). Such concerns are not new and parallel a phrase used in earlier writings related to carrying capacity. Higgins-Desbiolles (2018b) makes this connection when stating that overtourism happens when destinations exceed carrying capacities, leading to diminishing experiences for locals and/or visitors, and may result in serious consequences for some of the world's most popular destinations. The effects of unimpeded growth of tourism may also impact the endangering of tourism destinations through phenomena such as 'last chance tourism' (LCT). The fact that those

in privileged countries are continuing to travel for pleasure and leisure, while those in these endangered host communities must move in order to survive, is creating an environment of hostility, highlighting the inequity that underpins the operations of the tourism industry. One way to examine overtourism is through the wider context of tourism development, fostered by the capitalist economic system, prioritising profit accumulation of multinational corporations and the global elite (Fletcher, 2011; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008, 2018a). As a global industry centred on maximising profits, the tourism industry has capitalised on existing travel demand, as well as growing new market niches, despite increasing environmental and social concerns. The case of overtourism demonstrates the destructive impact of such an approach on host communities, while LCT highlights the industry's role in fear mongering, exacerbating tourism impacts contributing to the vulnerability of destinations.

A significant impact caused by travellers relates to the LCT market. LCT is defined as attracting tourists who “explicitly seek vanishing landscapes or seascapes, and/or disappearing natural and/or social heritage” (Lemelin, Dawson, Stewart, Maher & Lueck, 2010, p.478). Specifically, travellers are often drawn to visit iconic features, species or landscapes at risk of disappearing (Dawson, Stewart & Lemelin, 2012). LCT destinations tend to be remote areas as part of the appeal is to witness the decline of pristine nature (Groulx, Boluk, Lemieux & Dawson, 2019). Initially, LCT was used to describe the insurgent interest generated by tourists to visit Polar Regions (e.g., Eijegelaar, Thaper & Peeters, 2010) due to the perception that impeding vulnerably, as a consequence of climate change, may encumber future opportunities to experience a place in its pristine form (Lemelin, Dawson & Stewart, 2012). Such travellers although often aware of climate change, seem compelled to visit such places due to a strong sense of place attachment. As such, they are often able to self-justify the damage caused by their travel to the LCT destination (Groulx et al., 2019). This has led some scholars to identify a disconnect and, in fact, an ethical paradox of LCT as travellers seemingly value the place of interest however, simultaneously contribute to the climate impacts which threaten its existence (Dawson, Stewart, Lemelin, & Scott, 2010; Groulx et al., 2019).

Dawson et al. (2012) signal early examples of travellers who had the impetus to push themselves physically in order to conquer destinations such as Sir Edmund Hillary's successful summit of Everest. Contemporaneously, they identified a shifting lens to pursue 'lasts', specifically, pushing elite travellers to experience attractions and landscapes before they disappear (Dawson et al., 2012) or vulnerable indigenous populations (Johnston, Viken & Dawson, 2011). Clearly, recognising emancipatory processes via tourism e.g., overcoming physical challenges such as what may be

required to summit Everest, and/or challenges one may face to reach particular 'far reaching' destinations e.g., the arctic circle has put such places at risk. In the case of LCT, the physical (personal or geographic) has evidently created intrigue and thus a desire to go there and benefit from being able to tell others that they have been there and done that. Dawson et al. (2011, p. 257) ask the question "is it morally appropriate for the tourism industry or local communities to market vulnerable attractions as a tactic to achieve increased tourist visitation and revenues?"

Implied in the LCT literature is that this form of tourism undermines the places in which it occurs, rather than contributing to the destinations in a socially responsible way. Specifically, some of the literature draws attention to the inability of travellers to draw on their moral compass when choosing a LCT holiday (Groulx et al., 2019). As such, LCT prioritises the interests of privileged travellers over the well-being of the peoples and environments they are consciously choosing to visit. LCT as a niche, contributes to the very same problems as overtourism, and LCT reinforces the preoccupation with relentless expansion of tourism demand, regardless of the impacts which it engenders. Exacerbating the endemic problems of broader tourism, the LCT and the overtourism emphasise the urgent need to re-frame tourism, as an industry which can no longer sustain further growth.

3.0 Revisiting the Degrowth paradigm

From the onset of the modern tourism industry in the 19th century, and its rapid expansion in the post-war era, tourism became an integral part of the industrial economic structure. In recent decades, paralleling the move to neoliberal governance, the deregulation of markets and the continuous growth agenda, tourism has consolidated its role as one of the key engines of the world's economic growth. To suggest degrowth of the tourism industry, thus means to question the neoliberal growth paradigm in which it is embedded (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). Yet, as pointed out by Hall (2013, p. 1101), "in order to encourage sustainable tourism consumption the system itself, and the 'rules of the game', need to change". Explaining such 'degrowth' positioning to private and public organisations that derive benefits from tourism consumption is likely to be more than problematic. Yet, if no action is taken, the predicted growth in tourism, due to increasing democratisation of travel, and the resulting social and environmental impacts will undermine host communities and the ecosystem to the extent not previously experienced. At this stage, enforcing any viable change will be a reactive crisis management, with possible action restricted by the extent of the damage already caused.

The fundamental question remains – how may we go about achieving a degrowth agenda mutually considering the urgent call for action and the equity issues that are integral to ensuring sustainable and just tourism? In our earlier writings, we proposed a framework that would tackle some of these issues and support local communities in playing a central role in the tourism process (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). We argue here that tourism based in equity rights which would allow local communities to decide the number of tourists, as well as when, and how to welcome them. Focusing foremost on the benefits for them and for their land with a shift on the power structures will be essential for the sustainable future of tourism. The following sections will explore some of the steps required in this power shift, as well as examples of tourism based on equity and social justice and the role of self-reflecting academic processes which could contribute to the development of degrowth tourism.

3.1 Tourism Industry, Local Communities and the Power Shift

The response from the tourism industry regarding the growing sustainability imperative has been mixed and inconsistent not only across the different sectors of the industry, such as airlines and accommodation, but also within these sectors. As argued by Williams and Ponsford (2009), to some degree this could be attributed to the fragmentation of the tourism industry, as well as its geographic dispersion under various political and regulatory systems. Some of the inaction has also been attributed to the diverging interests with governments, industry and stakeholders looking to each other for leadership regarding sustainability (Williams & Ponsford, 2009).

The tourism sector continues to be primarily focused on sustainable tourism, failing to engage with the overall impact the travel sector is having on the sustainability of development at a much larger scale. Consequently, much of the measures that have so far dominated the industry's response to growing impacts of tourism have involved more micro level initiatives, including self-regulation, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and accreditation schemes (De Grosbois, 2016; Inoue & Lee, 2011). With the increasing recognition of the negative impacts of tourism among consumers and broader stakeholders, CSR measures were employed to demonstrate a proactive approach in dealing with such issues. It can be argued that there is much greater awareness of the negative impacts of the tourism industry, by the industry, but the policy-action gap remains one of the main obstacles to enforcing real and substantial change (Hall, 2009b). It has been argued that CSR, just as ecolabels and the promotion of ecotourism, have become a “reputational green-wash” (Williams & Ponsford, 2009, p. 398), or a marketing ploy aimed at building the brand and creating a point of differentiation for the businesses. This model has not questioned the fundamental rationale underlying the continuous growth agenda, but rather has been used as a means of developing new

'green' market niches and generating positive publicity, and hence contributing to further expansion of tourism.

Much of the efforts to address the negative impacts caused by tourism has been based on raising consumers' awareness of sustainability issues, but there are questions whether such an approach can generate urgently needed action and rethinking the way tourism functions (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018b), specifically, considering the needs and interests of local populations. Hall (2013) highlights the problem wherein the industry's response to crises, such as climate change, is framed by the very paradigm that has led to the issue in the first place. Integral to this debate is the perception of consumers as rational decision-makers who seek to extend the benefits of their consumption. The role of government and industry in the context of the sustainability debate is to affect the attitudes, behaviour and choice of existing and potential tourists (Hall, 2013). However, this framework hardly engages with the problematic nature of consumption itself, and the role consumption plays in a neoliberal society that has been pulverised by increasing inequality, weakened communities and social support – and where travel has increasingly been used to escape this reality. The fundamental issue here is that the focus on the consumer agency and the industry self-regulation has not delivered the necessary change:

What, after all, is the point of encouraging governance mechanisms such as partnerships, network development, self-regulation and individual responsibility if they continue to have no practical effect on the sustainability of tourism and consumption? If the ethical value of 'individual choice; leads to increased emissions from lifestyle and travel actions and worsening environmental change then how ethical is it? (Hall, 2013, p. 1104)

Recently, a few examples have surfaced from the transportation and travel segment, which demonstrate the focus on individual responsibility as the panacea to the adverse impacts generated by the tourism industry. The first example is a channel on Air New Zealand's inflight entertainment system dedicated to 'Tiaki - Care for New Zealand' - educating visitors about the importance of local peoples, travelling responsibly and safely (Air New Zealand, 2019). This channel emerged from the launch of the Tiaki Promise in November 2018 by the airline along with a few other partners including the Department of Conservation and Tourism New Zealand (Tourism New Zealand, 2019). Specifically, the Maori value of '*tiaki*' means to care for people and place. The video is narrated by an intergenerational duo including a young girl and millennial man. The message in the video empowers visitors to demonstrate a responsibility for the way in which they conduct themselves by protecting nature, driving carefully, being prepared, and

showing respect. Unfortunately, given the growth of tourism, producers' emphasis on the bottom line, and entitled behaviours demonstrated by elite travellers, such reminders are needed. Interestingly, Air New Zealand's campaign also sets up a paradox. A mode of transportation recognised as being high in CO₂ emissions calls on travellers to make socially conscious choices when travelling.

A group of climate change activists challenged some of the corporate sponsors such as Air France (refer to <https://www.thisiscoolossal.com/2015/11/brandalism-fake-ads-paris/>) leading up to the UN COP21 Climate Conference. Posters were secured behind glass on bus stop billboards. One photoshopped image revealed a female flight attendant with her left index finger over her mouth as if she was "shh"ing those watching. The descending text read

"TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE? OF COURSE NOT. WE'RE AN AIRLINE. We're sponsoring the UN Climate Conference so we look like we're part of the solution and to make sure our profits aren't affected. Economic growth is far more important than saving the planet. So we'll keep on bribing politicians and emitting green house gases. Just keep it to yourself. AIRFRANCE PART OF THE PROBLEM" (Sierzputowski, 2015).

The billboard clearly encouraged commuters to pay closer attention to the content revealing the unpleasant truths, and highlighting the hypocrisy of many companies publicly acknowledging the concerns of climate change but not necessarily addressing such concerns within their own business (Sierzputowski, 2015). Air France's sponsorship of the climate talks may have signalled their intent to be part of the solution; however, they fail to take action perpetuating the problem. This is typical in sustainability discussions in tourism that have been on-going for decades and yet there has been limited progress because there has been a lack of understanding regarding what actions have been taken (see Boluk et al., 2019).

Another airline, KLM, projects a similar responsibility message in a video (KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, 2019). However, in this context potential travellers are encouraged to think responsibly before they leave home. In the KLM video the narrator draws attention to the fact that consumers have become increasingly comfortable with flying to destinations for their holidays when indicating that "people have really gotten the hang of it" (KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, 2019). The video has an image of a glass of ice water emptying and filling again, potentially signalling the excessive consumption of water at tourism destinations (and resorts via pools, golf courses, long showers). This imagery may also draw one's attention to the melting of glaciers as a consequence of global warming aggravated by tourism; this is reinforced with the message: flying has "changed our world forever" (KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, 2019). Western entitlement and over consumption

are both explicit and implicit messages delivered in KLM's video. The next point is that if we want the next generation to experience our 'beautiful world' then 'we' (consumers) need to consider flying more responsibly. While the narrator quickly states that KLM is exploring ways to improve flying, the narrator mainly tasks consumers to make "more responsible decisions" (KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, 2019) when it comes to flying. Within a neoliberal context, KLM's choice to pass on the responsibility to consumers is obvious, easy for them to do, and demonstrates a lack of critical reflection regarding how they may do their part. All three of the examples described here could be argued as "reputational green-wash" (Williams & Ponsford, 2009, p. 398) as we described earlier, as the (minimal) efforts made may be an attempt to build their brands.

Neoliberal rhetoric has convinced individuals to bear the burden of the social and environmental issues caused by tourism and take action when really it is the fossil fuel burning and socially exploitative corporations who must actively reduce their output in order for change to be realised. Indeed, corporate ads, as evidenced here, commonly appeal to individual action. However, as *Guardian* journalist Lukacs (2017) suggests taxing individuals to change their behaviour is similar to "flapp[ing] towels in a burning house". The Carbon Majors Report (Griffin, 2017) highlights that 100 companies are responsible for 71% of global greenhouse emissions. This report suggests that there are a small set of fossil fuel producers who could contribute to systemic change. Moreover, Cheer, Goldsworthy, Mathews and Kanodia (2017) point out the multiple ways in which tourism organisations have been exploiting local communities in areas including sex tourism and orphanage tourism but also in the service supply chain. Clearly, large tourism businesses must make significant changes if tourism is to have a future.

KLM's video comes at a time when the world-renowned Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, an environmental activist, has gained media attention for boycotting air travel. Thunberg's activism, has seen her instigate more aggressive climate action from governments and the international community (Watts, 2019). She quickly became an international role model in her pursuit of a zero carbon journey (from London, UK to New York, US) to attend the Climate Action Summit (Milman, 2019), thus walking (or in this case sailing) the talk. Thunberg's activism and advocacy of the zero-carbon economy have led to the 'flight shame' ('flygskam') movement in Sweden and beyond, encouraging rail travel rather than air travel (Henley, 2019). Clearly, individual actions supported by environmental activists such as Thunberg should not be undermined. However, what Thunberg has role modelled and advocated for, is collectively calling on corporations to take responsibility and make changes to their operations in light of climate change. Specifically, Thunberg called on governments to recognise the collapse of ecosystems and called leaders out

regarding their obsession with economic growth. This call could and should link the climate crisis with the social crisis taking place in exploiting local communities and Indigenous groups around the world. The social injustices (which are also based on environmental injustices) must be tackled by the tourism industry as the climate change strike organised by Thunberg on September 28, 2019 which finally witnessed the support of businesses. For example, in Canada Mountain Equipment Co-op (selling outdoor equipment) closed for the day (Pittis, 2019). Such participation could be critiqued as minimal and perhaps expected given that such businesses are reliant on stable environmental conditions in order for consumers to continue purchasing their products. However, emphasising action on behalf of producers is where we feel more attention is required. Such action supports Jackson's (2017) notion of sustainable prosperity, whereby prosperity is possible without causing destructive growth.

3.2 Proposals for Action

Understanding the magnitude of the crisis we are facing – a crisis in which tourism plays a very central role – requires a fundamental and paradigmatic shift that includes not only individual action but also broader reconfiguration of the governance structure and the role consumption plays in the overall economic system. Business as usual is no longer an option, and as such, corporations themselves need to challenge the status quo recognising that well-being should take precedence over profit. While our optimism is diminishing, we present a number of ideas to support the essential change that is necessary.

In line with the Paris Agreement signed in 2016 regarding greenhouse gas emissions mitigation and adaptation and Ripple et al.'s (2020) identification of air transport being one of the fifteen indicators contributing greatly to climate change the most obvious suggestion would be to reduce the number of flights on offer. Recognising the impacts of LCT and overtourism specifically, we feel it is incumbent upon airlines to immediately take action on reducing and ideally eliminating flights to destinations where tourism is causing irreparable harm. Airlines could consider investing more in programmes supporting the local communities that have been negatively affected by tourism. Going one step further, those airlines who are serious about reducing their impacts may consider a *reverse* reward programme rewarding those in some capacity who fly less. Building on this idea airlines may work more closely with businesses to determine ways to reduce the amount of (unnecessary) travel required for their employees- this form of consultancy could surface as an alternative way to generate revenue. Given that Ripple et al. (2020) also identify concerns regarding the global consumption of animal products, perhaps airlines may consider providing mostly if not all locally (from departure point) produced vegetarian/vegan meal/snack options

during in-flight service. Furthermore, perhaps airlines could give a second thought to the mass produced items sold in their in-flight shopping and instead recognise and prioritise the livelihoods of those at the destinations they are bringing tourists too. Additionally, it may be in the realm of possibility for airlines to prioritise hiring local Indigenous peoples, and/or develop partnerships with local guides. These examples may support a movement to support local food, experiences and guides that could have a resounding impact transcending the transportation segment alone.

Building on some of the ideas presented here and borrowing the idea of Air New Zealand's in-flight channel devoted to educating travellers about *tiaki*, perhaps a tourist education tethered with a reflexive approach on behalf of airlines regarding how they may play better is needed. Such reflexivity may move beyond solely encouraging the traveller to make responsible choices, but also allow airlines to recognise their negative impacts, and consider ways they may actively pursue better practices in light of their responsibilities to the planet and peoples. Such in-flight channels may be one step in the direction of encouraging airlines to recognise their impact and shift the power toward local smaller scale entrepreneurs and businesses that could benefit from a spot light shone on their efforts. In this way, such suggestions offered here are not anti-travel, but rather provide room for businesses to consider how they may demonstrate responsible leadership and sustainable prosperity.

3.3 Local community-centred tourism

Elsewhere we have argued for a locally community-centred tourism to replace the current pro-growth corporatized form of tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). Placing local communities at the centre of tourism is essential because it is their communities that receive, host and are impacted by tourism. Examples from Venice, Dubrovnik and Barcelona (see Chapter 1, this volume) suggest the possibilities and it is now the task of tourism scholars to seize the moment to think through the frameworks which would support such a transformation. The framework starts at the centre with empowered and interested local communities (Figure 2). This then connects outward to the transformed roles of tourists, the tourism industry, destination marketing organisations and governments (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019).



Figure 21 Community-Centred Tourism Framework as a mechanism for degrowing tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019)

Starting at the centre of our reformed vision for tourism is an agenda to empower and involve citizens in important tourism development policy and planning. Admittedly, this will not be easy as most societies have moved away from a vision of tourism as a matter for exercising civic-mindedness as tourism has been corporatized and recast as a mere business sector (see Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). But we see the emerging possibilities for this situation to be challenged and overturned. Its possibilities are evident in places such as Bhutan with its policy of gross national happiness and in New Zealand with its well-being agenda and the associated *tiaki* promise programme in tourism (see Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). There is also evidence in communities that are angered by the damages of overtourism that there is an untapped appetite for citizen action to take hold of tourism and wrest it from the control of corporate power and indifferent governments (see Burgen, 2018). The actions of the Kangaroo Island community of South Australia in creating and engaging with the Tourism Optimisation Management Model is an invaluable precedent for this (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2011; Jack, 2000). Those communities, from Barcelona to Venice to Amsterdam, are taking actions that reveal the possibilities for re-engaging citizenry in the shaping of tourism to their needs. We would propose here a role for local communities, citizenry of all categories, to take a leading role in tourism related decision-making that ensures that the only tourism allowed in their communities are those forms that they benefit from and invite. Building on the experience of Kangaroo Island, we would advocate a development of a process of citizen assemblies to participate at strategic tourism decision-making points such

as for the development of tourism strategic plans. Learning from recent thinking on empowering citizen assemblies in political decision-making can inform this process undertaken for locally governed tourism decision-making (e.g. Prachett et al., 2009).

As part of a reformed tourism, it is essential that tourists are compelled to transform their attitudes from one of privileged consumers to one of responsible guests. As we abandon the old mindset that the places where tourism happens are ‘tourism destinations’, we can remember that these places are in fact the homes of local communities. We need to reinvigorate responsible tourism education, codes and guidelines and incentivise the tourists to engage with them. This can be accomplished positively through efforts to demonstrate how warm welcomes and meaningful experiences result from such an approach to touring. A positive recent example is Amsterdam’s ‘marry a local’ tourism campaign which invited visitors to experience off-the-beaten- path parts of the community and with the guidance of willing locals (Adams, 2019). There are also more negative tools to be employed to reorient the tourists, including penalties, such as: closure of certain places; fines for infringements; banning; and even deportation. The seeds for this transition are already evident with New Zealand’s *tiaki* promise programme working to alert visitors to the need to be prepared to drive safely on New Zealand’s roads (Air New Zealand, 2019). It has been a serious source of anger to New Zealanders that international tourists have caused death and injury due to a lack of road readiness; the *tiaki* promise pushes visitors who may not be experienced in driving on the left-hand side of the road to make responsible choices such as not undertaking self-drive holidays. This serves as one illustrative example of how the concerns of the local community can shape the conduct of tourism so that visitors conform to local conditions, expectations and needs.

The next pillar of the process is re-embedding governance of tourism so that it is answerable to local community concerns and requirements. Many have noted how the advance of neoliberal agendas have reduced the role of government authorities in controlling, regulating, legislating and limiting tourism (Fletcher, 2011; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008, 2011). In fact, currently governments act as facilitators of development against community wishes. A recent case in point comes from Australia, where the departments of state governments in states such as Tasmania, Queensland and South Australia are facilitating luxury ‘eco’ lodge developments within the national parks they administer despite considerable local community opposition (Gartry, 2019). The key problem to overcome is that in many instances the government agencies concerned with conservation and environmental protection are being forced to be made hospitable to tourism developments (see Higgins-Desbiolles, 2011). Simultaneously, the government agencies concerned with tourism

have been restructured from public service to simple marketing bodies (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018b). As a result, these tourism agencies prioritise ceaseless growth in tourism and facilitate the agendas of powerful tourism industry interests, even when this arouses considerable public anger and opposition. If the damages of tourism over-development are going to be over-turned, this aspect of hijacking tourism governance is going to have to be halted. More positively, we would encourage governance of tourism for community well-being through well-tested social tourism initiatives that have at their heart equity and inclusivity (see Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019).

Tourism businesses, particularly large multinationals and powerful business players, will have to abandon modes of operating that see destinations as opportunities to be mined for extraction of profits. However, as pointed out by Milano, Novelli and Cheer (2019, p. 1861) “the aversion to degrowth stokes fears of economic recession and threats to political longevity of governments and business viability of corporations, making ensuing contentions prone to politicisation and fear mongering”. It is increasingly apparent that one major catalyst to the crises of overtourism has been the way corporations have been operating; in analysing overtourism accusations have been levelled at the low-cost airlines, the major cruise companies and the disrupters such as Airbnb (Oklevik et al., 2019). In the realm of corporate governance, there is increasing attention paid to reining in the powers of corporates and attention given to discipline corporates to the demands of social licenses to operate. We advocate an active agenda to make this meaningful in tourism destinations around the world. The tourism corporations that send tourists to local communities will have to actively engage with local communities to access their resources and deliver benefits that result in improvement and well-being rather than profit extraction. We see examples of this at a small scale and there is no reason that this cannot be made realistic and mandatory at a larger scale. Additionally, active support and facilitation of locally-owned and locally responsible tourism businesses should be prioritised. We can identify examples of this in campaigns such as buy local and in segments such as slow tourism (Caffyn, 2012).

4.0 Final Thoughts

In tourism research some but not abundant attention has been given to the concept of equity. Areas such as volunteer tourism for example have referred to the concept. Burrai, Font and Cochrane (2015, p. 452) pointed out that “if individuals perceive that there is equity and justice within the exchange relationships they are involved in, they experience feelings of contentment that results in positive reactions and perceptions”. Previously we drew attention to some strategic changes in the narrative taken by airlines, we then discussed in detail the opportunities for local communities if the power dynamic shifted and their interests were prioritised. The examples used throughout

acknowledge that a local voice is important, however, in the case of the travel and transportation sector it seems they fail to share and ultimately shift power based on an equity rights concept. Importantly, what the examples show are minimal efforts recognising the importance of local peoples which may come across as disingenuous considering the concerns expressed have not been translated into action. As such, the examples presented could be critiqued as being “reputational green-wash” (Williams & Ponsford, 2009, p. 398).

If the tourism industry were to seriously reflect on and adopt the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and prescribed targets perhaps it would be possible to contribute to sustainability, social justice and equity agendas. As an example, the growing awareness regarding climate change and strikes around the world pushing governments to do more toward the preservation of the environment, as well as the example of activist Greta Thunberg in not flying may at least encourage sectors of the tourism industry to re-think their policies and operations and perhaps give voice to local concerns. However, and as we have advocated before, the adaptation of the tourism industry to the environmental narrative may not be enough to address issues regarding inequity. Moreover, the concept of degrowth based on a ‘minimalistic’ view of consumption may also not be sufficient if not based on the concept of equity rights and local community empowerment.

Williams and Ponsford’s (2009) argue that inaction is attributed to diverging interests of various stakeholder groups e.g., governments, industry, producers, and consumers as they look to each other for leadership in response to pressing sustainability. Unfortunately, those who have been left out of decision-making positions are affected the most by unsustainable tourism. Importantly, inaction can no longer be tolerated – scientists (e.g., Ripple et al., 2020) have pointed out that we are at a critical point and change is required immediately. In line with broader climate emergency activism, it is imperative that governments enforce real change in overseeing tourism corporations that are responsible for contributing to social and environmental inequalities. Corporations who have been using local resources, local images and voices but at the same time ignoring local community rights must be accountable. As such, our proposal for an active agenda encouraging tourism corporations to engage with local communities and ensure they deliver direct benefits improving communities is imperative rather than prioritising profit. We indicated earlier there are examples of small-scale mindful businesses which are locally-owned and locally responsible, as such we do not believe this is unrealistic and indeed believe this trajectory should be mandatory. The degrowth proposition offers these organisations, as well as governments a reconciliatory approach towards a more fair and sustainable tourism that may have a future. The failure to achieve

a reconciliatory degrowth approach may mean that 'last chance tourism' will be the 'last stop' for tourism, undermining destinations, threatening vulnerable Indigenous populations, destroying flora and fauna and unbalancing essential ecosystems.

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