

X. 'Leave no one behind': Towards sustainable innovations in tourism development

<a>Introduction

Since the late 1980s sustainability has emerged as a paradigm characterising almost all kinds of socio-economic development discourses and strategies, on different scales and in varying development contexts. This is also the case with the tourism industry and how its development thinking and practices have been understood, argued and aimed to be designed over the past three decades (Bramwell 2011; Saarinen 2019). This connection between tourism and sustainable development has been highly successful for the industry, as it has served to justify the development needs of tourism locally and globally. On some level, the idea of sustainability was a major 'innovation' for the industry (Bramwell & Lane 2011), and many scholars consider sustainability discourse as a major success story for tourism studies and policies (Swarbrooke 1999; Hall 2011; Ruhanen et al. 2015).

This success aspect applies to the discussions of the role of tourism in the global development agenda. Many international development agencies, including various branches of the United Nations (UN), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), for example, consider tourism as a highly prospective tool for global development (World Bank 2012; Saarinen & Rogerson 2014). The World Bank Group (2017), for example, has listed 20 reasons why the tourism industry works for development beyond the tourism industry. These reasons are linked with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically to the issues and targets related to sustainable economic growth; social inclusiveness, employment and poverty reduction; resource efficiency, environmental protection and climate; cultural values, diversity and heritage; and mutual understanding, peace and security (Saarinen 2019, 2020). Furthermore, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2012) has indicated that the industry could contribute to inclusive and global sustainable development by continuing the dynamic growth path it has experienced since the 1950s. By doing so, it is assumed that tourism will bring sustainable development to destination communities and environments.

However, this growth path and its promoted connections with sustainable development thinking have been the subject of intensified criticism in tourism studies and sustainable destination governance discussions (see Hunter 1995; Sharpley 2000; Liu 2003; Saarinen & Gill 2019; Gössling, Scott & Hall 2020). An increasing number of commentators indicate that the local and global impacts of a growth-oriented tourism industry are in deep and increasing conflict with the key principles and elements of the very idea of sustainable development, which are not only economic but also integrated into environmental and human well-being (see Scheyvens 2011; Saarinen 2014; Hall, Gössling & Scott 2015; Nunkoo, Seetanah & Agrawal 2019). As a demonstration of this deepening criticism and frustration, Sharpley (2009) has suggested that we should forget and move beyond sustainability rhetoric and goals in tourism development thinking. It is easy to agree with the critical sentiments, but the question is: if it is not the sustainability paradigm, what would the alternative framework be that could lead the tourism industry to serve human and environmental well-being and quality of life in the future?

Sustainable development in tourism faces multiple and serious challenges. However, instead of searching for a new ‘Holy Grail’ for tourism and development that would support the earth as the home of humankind, the purpose of this chapter is to rethink the role of tourism in sustainable development, specifically in the local-global nexus. While sustainability per se was a major innovation in the tourism development policies of the 1990s, we are facing an urgent need for “innovations in sustainable tourism” (Bramwell & Lane 2012, p. 1). There are many technical and practical implementations of sustainable development in tourism (Hjalager 2010), but those changes towards better tourism management have been mostly incremental in nature, representing local- or destination-level responses to global-scale challenges. These responses have included elements such as visitor impact management, new support mechanisms for nature conservation, energy efficiency, recycling and other environmentally friendly practices in tourism and hospitality management (see Butler 1999; Hjalager 1997). They all are important for tourism destination governance and resilience management.

However, instead of overviewing these kinds of Schumpeterian interventions in tourism (see Fuglsang 2008), this chapter will discuss the need for creating radical changes, i.e. innovations in tourism, especially in the global-scale governance of sustainable tourism development. Emphasis is given on the idea of sustainable tourism innovation ecosystems, and especially how tourism and its innovation potential could contribute to the UN Agenda 2030: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations 2015) highlighting global responsibility of leaving no one behind in development. Recently, the potential of tourism to work with the SDGs has been highlighted in literature (Hughes & Scheyvens 2016; Saarinen 2020), but there has been a limited attention on what would be the conditions for such contributions, especially in a global level. In this respect, the chapter calls for policy-level innovations beyond incremental ones that would guide the tourism industry towards greater global responsibility.

First the chapter will outline the key issues in sustainable tourism and how it is understood in destination development contexts. After that, the core focus is directed onto the evolving ideas and connections between tourism and the UN Agenda 2030: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations 2015). This calls for radical changes in tourism development and governance, which are obviously very difficult to predict and plan in detail. Still, in order to harness the tourism industry to serve the SDGs, there is a major need for multiscale policy and governance-level innovations in sustainable tourism development. These radical changes need to consider not only the destination but also system-level, i.e. global-scale, challenges. In this respect, probably the most urgent issue is the process of climate change and how the global tourism sector could adjust to the need to become a carbon-neutral industry in the future.

<a>Sustainable tourism development

Sustainable development and tourism: innovation connection

The idea of sustainability and its role and connections with tourism development represented a major policy innovation for tourism in the late 1980s and 1990s. Sustainable tourism management emerged as a destination-centred innovation ecosystem for businesses to collaborate in (Baggio & Cooper 2010), i.e. to network with other businesses, public sector agencies and communities in order to move towards the ideals of sustainable development. Initial definitions for sustainable tourism were derived directly from the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report 'Our Common Future', which defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, p. 43). Based on this, the World Tourism Organization outlined that sustainable tourism aims to meet "the needs of current tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future" (UNWTO 1993, p. 7).

Since the early conceptualisations and discussions, the role and idea of sustainability in tourism development has been positioned and defined in various ways in research and policy-making (see Clarke 1997; UNEP 2005; Saarinen 2014; UNWTO 2017), with an active aim to integrate the basic elements and principles of sustainable development with tourism. The basic elements are widely referred to in the literature and are commonly categorised as ecological, social and economic sustainability (WCED 1987; McCool & Bosak 2016). In addition, political sustainability is sometimes utilised as an independent basic element (see Levy 1997), but it can also be interpreted as being an integral part of the other basic elements. Indeed, there is no apolitical nature or apolitical economy, for example, in tourism or development in general. However, the political aspect is important for sustainability management. In tourism studies it often refers to the challenging issues in sustainability planning and governance that involve many different stakeholders and participation mechanisms with potentially conflicting values, preferences and development goals (Scheyvens 2002; Saarinen 2006; Bramwell 2011; Saarinen & Gill 2019).

Compared to the ecological, economic and social elements, the basic principles have been discussed less in sustainable tourism studies and policy-making. They refer to the ideas of holism and intergenerational and intragenerational equity. Definitionally, by emphasising these principles our focus turns to the needs of the present generations without compromising the needs of future generations (see Redcliffe 1987; WCED 1987; Lélé, 1991). As such, they represent a very challenging task for tourism as a private sector industry and its sustainability, which may explain why they have been less discussed and applied in sustainable tourism and innovation studies. However, the recent connection between tourism and SDGs indicates a stronger involvement of the holistic system-level approach, which will be discussed later.

In relation to the past innovation patterns in sustainable tourism, Hjalager (1997) has developed an analytical typology that distinguishes the following types of innovations: product innovations, classical process innovations, process innovations in information handling, management innovations and institutional innovations. Furthermore, Hjalager sub-divides product innovations into nature tourism products, innovation in the equipment sectors attached to nature tourism, professional tours, development of supplementary natural resources, the 'green' establishment as products, and product developments limiting tourism volumes. Similarly, management innovations are sub-divided into staff, residents and tourists, and process

innovations in information handling into individual enterprises and parks and destinations. Altogether, this typology paints a rather complex and fragmented picture of innovations in tourism that almost exclusively work on a local scale (see also Hjalager 2010).

In relation to the last sub-type (parks and destinations) of management innovations, Hjalager (1997) highlights the issue of carrying capacity as a key innovation strategy. Indeed, many scholars have emphasised the role of carrying capacity thinking in the evolution of sustainable tourism development (see Butler 1996, 1999; 2006). In this respect, Hjalager (1997) further states that environmental issues have often challenged the potential range of actual innovations in tourism development. This notion is based on a tourism-centric perspective in tourism planning and development (Burns, 1999; Saarinen, 2006), which is important, but like environmental carrying capacity it represents only a limited framework for evaluating innovations and their role and potential in sustainable tourism. From the tourism-centric perspective, innovations are considered predominantly a part of defensive strategies by the industry that aim to react to external pressures in the operational environment. This reactive character of the tourism industry towards externally-driven changes has been highlighted in adaptation- and resilience-related studies (see Hall, Payang & Amore 2018; Lew & Cheer 2018; Saarinen & Gill 2019). Tervo-Kankare, Kaján and Saarinen (2018), for example, studied the tourism industry’s adaptation mechanisms towards environmental change in Arctic Finland. In contrast with proactive innovations in adaptation, tourism operators and tourism-dependent local businesses almost exclusively relied on passive adaptation, representing a reactive innovation approach, as highlighted by Hjalager (1997). This reactive innovation involves learning based on experienced situations, such as external pressures and changes, and they are implemented only if they result in concrete and preferably immediate outcomes and improvements. In contrast, proactive innovation and adaptation in tourism involves active learning and decision-making that aims to improve knowledge and learning before factual change pressures in the operational environment (Cooper 2006; Tervo-Kankare, Kaján & Saarinen 2018; see Walters 1986) (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Innovation management approaches in tourism adaptation

Proactive innovation	Reactive innovation
Active	Passive
Driven by search for knowledge and information	Driven by experiences and external pressures
Mainly voluntary	Mainly forced
Perceived as investment	Perceived as cost
Future oriented, long-term	Present day-focused, short-term

Source: Adapted from Walters (1986), Hjalager (1997, 2010) and Tervo-Kankare, Kaján and Saarinen (2018). Authors’ own compilation

Instead of prioritising certain perspectives or stakeholders, however, the different elements and principles of sustainable development should be regarded as balanced

(see Daly, 1996; Saarinen, 2014, 2021), which is a highly challenging task in practice. In principle, however, Higgins (2015, p. 186) has stated that sustainability calls for “balance among economy, society, and environment; balance between present and future; balance in the ways we achieve happiness and well-being; and balance between our small selves and the welfare of society.” This means that sustainable tourism innovations that prioritise economic growth, for example, and neglect ecological and/or social limits, are unrealistic and unsustainable in the long term. As said, this balanced approach in sustainable tourism development has turned out to be a major challenge both in theory and practice, as demonstrated next in the context of setting the limits to growth in tourism development. These different understandings of the limits to growth refer to carrying capacity issues and tourism-centric views, as indicated by Hjalager (1997), but also other structural and social innovations in sustainable tourism.

Setting the limits to growth: sustainable tourism innovation ecosystems

In the literature, innovation ecosystem are generally considered complex relationships between various actors and stakeholders, whose main aim is to promote development and innovation (see Aarikka-Stenroos & Ritala, 2017; Frenkel & Maital, 2014). In their recent conceptual review on innovation ecosystem literature, Granstrand and Holgersson (2020, p. 1) synthesised the following definition:

“An innovation ecosystem is the evolving set of actors, activities, and artefacts, and the institutions and relations, including complementary and substitute relations, that are important for the innovative performance of an actor or a population of actors.”

In addition to a technological or economic innovation emphasis, which have been the dominant aspects of innovations in the literature, there is an emerging body of literature on social innovations (see Mumford 2002). They refer to non-material grounds and forms of innovations, which obviously can have concreted tangible results in the innovation ecosystems. Neumeier (2012, p. 65) has defined social innovations generally “as a change in the attitudes, behaviour or perceptions of a group of people joined in a network of aligned interests that, in relation to the group’s horizon of experiences, leads to new and improved ways of collaborative action in the group and beyond.” In the tourism development context, Mosedale and Voll (2017) view social innovation as a social outcome or a process of collaborative innovation, which benefit from co-operation and co-production creating changes in social interactions and practices. Thus, the co-created and shared aspects guiding planning, development and management are crucial in social innovations (see Mumford & Moertl 2003).

The term ‘ecosystem’ is somewhat metaphorical in development and innovation policies and its use has also been criticised in these contexts (see Oh et al. 2016). Despite criticisms, the term demonstrates the complexity of innovation processes in a multiscale network of actors and institutions working in collaboration, but also often competing with potentially conflicting interests. Although ecosystems’ exact boundaries are difficult to draw, in tourism these innovation ecosystems are often scaled to a destination level and their innovation governance (see Baggio & Cooper 2010; Bulc 2011). In this respect, one of the key issues has been how to understand

and set the limits to growth in tourism destinations (Saarinen 2006). There are different traditions of sustainability thinking in tourism, which represent identifiable social innovations that also have various economic, social and ecological implications for tourism destination environments, economies and communities.

Initially, the policies and approaches aiming to manage the impacts of tourism development were based on carrying capacity thinking, which also relate with the innovation ecosystem thinking but more as a limiting element for tourism growth. In this respect, Hjalager (1997) identified as one of the process innovations in information handling for tourism destinations. The idea of carrying capacity has its origins in ecosystem management, specifically in late 19th-century livestock and wildlife management studies (Pigram & Jenkins 1999). It was applied to recreation and tourism studies in the 1920s and 1930s (see McMurray 1930; Jones 1933), but the major developments in research and destination management took place from the 1960s till the early 1980s (see Lucas 1964; Wagar 1964, 1974; Getz 1983; Stankey & McCool 1984). In tourism studies the carrying capacity model led to a search for the 'magical' number of tourists that cannot be overstepped without serious negative impacts on resources, which tourism is based on (Wall 1982). This resource-based idea of sustainable tourism implies an objective and measurable limit to growth, at which point there is no room for any more tourists or tourist activities and operations in a certain environment (Saarinen 2006).

Carrying capacity thinking has played an important role in destination governance (see Butler 1999, 2011). Especially in national parks, wilderness areas and other nature-based tourism destinations, the carrying capacity model and its different applications have been key instruments in tourism management. Frameworks such as the limits of acceptable change (LAC) were major innovations that are still utilised in land-use governance and planning (see McCool & Lime 2001). Beyond nature-based tourism environments, however, the implementation of the carrying capacity model has not been highly successful (Hjalager 1997; Lindberg McCool & Stankey 1997), as its emphasis on the (original) conditions of resources has been evaluated as being too limiting for the growth-oriented and impact-driven tourism industry. In order to avoid resource condition- and conservation-driven development models, some scholars have emphasised that the industry needs to have a central and active role in defining sustainability and the limits to growth in tourism development (Swarbrooke 1999). Indeed, from the 1990s the World Tourism Organization, for example, has been active in defining the principles of sustainable tourism with a changed emphasis towards more tourism-centric definitions (see UNWTO, 1993, 2017; UNEP 2005; Saarinen 2014).

Obviously, the industry is a key stakeholder in tourism management and, as a result, it needs to be actively involved in the development of sustainable tourism thinking and practices. This is evident in the UNWTO's (2020) mission statement that says: "The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism." However, this involvement has progressed beyond simple contribution and involvement within the ideas referring to the basic principles of sustainable development and the balanced approach between environmental, social and economic elements in development. Instead, the industry and its international lobby organisations, such as the UNWTO, may have fundamentally changed the idea of

sustainability in tourism (see Gössling, Scott & Hall 2020) and repositioned, or centralised, the industry's role in sustainable development (Saarinen, 2019, 2021). Rather than seeing tourism as a potential tool for sustainable development, the idea of sustainability has been increasingly used as an argument for and legitimisation of tourism growth in different environments (Mowforth & Munt 1998; Scheyvens 2009, 2011).

Indeed, tourism is a growth-oriented and dynamic activity that has various and often significant impacts on its natural and cultural resource base. From a tourism-based or -centric approach, the focus is on the development and resource needs of tourism as an economic activity (Burns 1999; Swarbrooke 1999; Sharpley 2009). From this perspective the limits to growth are based on the capacity of the industry to innovate new products and generate growth. Interestingly, the tourism-centric approach to sustainable tourism development is demonstrated in Butler's (1980, 2006) tourism area lifecycle (TALC) model. The model involves a product lifecycle approach but also carrying capacity thinking. However, their relationship is dynamic or relativistic by nature (Martin & Uysal 1990; Baum 1998).

In brief, the TALC model depicts a tourism destination development process through specified stages from small-scale operations (exploration stage and involvement stage) to a development stage that is characterised by rapid and massive changes in the environment. After the development stage a destination evolves to a mass-scale tourism attraction (consolidation stage and eventually a stagnation stage), which is economically but also politically highly dependent on the tourism industry and constant tourist flows. According to the model, the stagnation stage indicates that many of the elements of carrying capacity have been reached. If the limits to the growth of the model were based on resource-based carrying capacity thinking, the peak of the evolution cycle of a destination would now be reached. However, in the TALC context, a destination as an innovation ecosystem is not resource-based but tourism industry-based; by developing new products, infrastructure and/or reaching out to new market segments, for example, a destination's evolution can be initiated again. This results in a rejuvenation of the product cycle. Thus, a non-growth situation implies that innovations would be needed in tourism operations and products in order to experience further growth (Butler 1980; Baum 1998). Indirectly, the tourism-based approach to the limits to growth also emphasises a need to reduce institutional regulations in natural and cultural resource use and management (see McCarthy 2002) by highlighting a governance model with a strong self-regulation capacity by the industry (see Saarinen 2014, 2021). This is partially based on the active role of the industry and its international representatives, such as UNWTO, in defining the principles and goals of sustainable tourism development over the past three decades.

Obviously, the relationship between (natural or cultural) resource-based and tourism-based sustainability can be highly conflicting (Saarinen 2006). In this respect, Scheyvens (2009, p. 193) has critically asked why we should assume that the tourism industry has some ethical commitment to ensuring that their businesses contribute to development beyond the industry, e.g. poverty alleviation or traditional livelihoods (see Hall 2007). In order to overcome and manage conflicts between the industry, environment and local stakeholders and other resource users, different participatory approaches have been developed (see Blaikie 2006; Ngoni & Saarinen 2020). These approaches aim to utilise participatory planning by involving local communities and

other stakeholders in tourism development (see Selin 1999; Jamal & Stronza 2009). From this perspective, community participation and control over the uses and benefits of destination resources has become centralised (see Scheyvens 2002; Williams & Gill 2005). This community-based sustainable tourism development depends heavily on participatory planning and a specific need to empower host communities in tourism development and destination resource governance (Cole 2006; Scheyvens 2002; Saarinen 2019). Obviously, this is a challenging and complex process involving various kinds of limitations and dimensions. In this respect, Scheyvens (1999) has categorised empowerment into economic, social, political and psychological dimensions (Table 1.2), which should all be considered in sustainable tourism planning and development.

Table 1.2 Community empowerment in sustainable tourism development

Empowerment type	Characteristics in tourism
Economic	There are concrete individual/household-level benefits and material improvements in communities with widely shared income
Social	Tourism contributes to employment and community cohesion. Tourism creates community benefits beyond individuals
Political	There are fair and working participation processes that involve a wide spectrum of community members over gender, age, ethnicity, etc. limits in tourism planning and development
Psychological	Tourism supports a confidence among community members and creates positive attitudes towards local traditions and ways of living. Tourism supports previously marginalised segments of communities and builds self-esteem

Source: Adapted from Scheyvens (1999, 2002)

The different overviewed approaches towards sustainability and the limits to growth in tourism reflect the ecological, economic and social elements of sustainable development. As such, the resource-, tourism- and community-based approaches have represented specific innovation ecosystem frameworks and policies for tourism destination governance. Hegemonically, the focus of sustainable tourism development discourse has gradually moved from resource-based sustainability towards tourism-based sustainability and specific market-oriented management, growth-driven and corporate social responsibility dimensions in destination innovation policies (see Coles, Fenclova & Dinan 2013; Middleton & Hawkins 1998; Saarinen 2014). This shift, which emphasises the industry's self-regulative power in growth management, may contradict with the original idea of sustainable development focusing on the well-being of people and environment. However, it would be simplistic to

automatically equate growth with unsustainability without considering the issues of scale and context. Related to this, the community-based approach and the recent focus on the prospective role of tourism in serving the SDGs has further problematised the connections between development and growth: strictly delimiting the element of growth would most probably leave large parts of humankind behind, especially in the Global South.

<a> Sustainable development goals and tourism: a paradox of growth needs in global tourism

Growth and development

Current discussions in sustainability studies and policies involve two terms that seem to be used almost in parallel: development and growth. Sustainable development has been the dominant expression, but it is increasingly challenged by the idea of sustainable growth (Saarinen 2021). This is especially the case in international policy-making. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2020), for example, focuses on the promotion of sustainable growth that will help people benefit from economic growth (see also UNCTAD 2012). Similarly, the European Commission has its own action plan on financing sustainable growth in Europe and beyond (European Commission 2018). While the difference between development and growth may be an issue of semantics in this context, there are also major differences in meanings and political interest behind. As indicated by Gössling, Scott and Hall (2020), many supranational organisations in tourism policy-making, like the UNWTO, may simply be tourism growth advocates using sustainability rhetoric (see Hall 2009, 2019; Hollenhorst et al. 2014; Gössling et al. 2016).

Both development and growth depend on innovations in tourism but they are open to different interpretations. In general, development can be defined as a process in which human capacity increases towards “a better life” (Peet and Hardwick 2015, p. 1). Reyes (2001) connects development to sustainability by emphasising that development is a social condition in which the needs of people are satisfied by the sustainable use of natural (and cultural) resources. Traditionally, this connection to sustainability has differentiated development from growth (Saarinen 2021). The United States Local Government Commission, for example, states that “growth means to get bigger, development means to get better – an increase in quality and diversity” (cited by Pike, Rodríguez-Pose & Tomaney 2007, p. 1253). Thus, development is focused on human well-being and qualitative dimensions in social and economic processes (Sen 1992).

However, growth is not necessarily in conflict with development in all contexts. Rather, it is but one very complicated and ambivalent aspect of development (see Daly 1996; Sen 1992). In order to reduce global poverty and advocate human development, for example, economic growth is currently needed (Moyo 2018). However, this economic growth will create costs that are detrimental to humanity and communities in the future, which is widely discussed and acknowledged in relation to global climate change. The integral irony of economic growth is that it often increases inequality between those who have and those who have not (Carmody 2019; Sharpley 2020; Wilkinson & Pickett 2010). Thus, instead of focusing on growth benefiting the

few (see Piketty 2014), there is an increasing need for more inclusive forms of development, which involves economic but also social and environmental elements (Spangenberg 2014). This wider focus is the core of sustainable development thinking (Saarinen, 2006). In order to acknowledge the wider ground, there is an urgent need for major policy innovations in sustainable tourism development and governance. Paradoxically, these future policy innovations calling for radical changes in the global tourism industry need to include the resource-based idea of the limits to growth, as the planet's resources are not infinite, but they should also acknowledge the need for growth for just development. This is a highly challenging combination but recent connections between tourism development and SDGs may have great potential to serve both accounts.

 Sustainable development goals as policy innovation for global tourism

After reducing global poverty based on the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (UN MDGs) project (United Nations, 2000) in 1990–2015 (see UNWTO 2006; Saarinen & Rogerson 2014), the UN member states ratified the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs in 2015 (United Nations 2015). One of the principle values of SDGs is to 'leave no one behind'. According to the United Nations (2015) it represents the unequivocal commitment of all UN member states to eradicate poverty, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities involved with global economic development. This principle of leaving no one behind represents what sustainable development in tourism should be all about, but in practice it would be a radical departure from current sustainable tourism policies, as the development of the global tourism industry would be based on the aim of contributing positively to the critical elements that otherwise undermine the potential of individuals and humanity as a whole in economic growth.

SDGs represent social and policy innovations that define the agenda for global development. In general, the SDGs address major issues in development and well-being challenges, such as poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice. In total there are 17 goals (Table 1.3) and 169 specific targets, which are set to transform the world by the year 2030.

Table 1.3 The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Goal number	Core elements
Goal 1:	No Poverty: inclusive economic growth, sustainable jobs and equality
Goal 2:	Zero Hunger: the food and agriculture sectors as solutions for development
Goal 3:	Good Health and Well-being
Goal 4:	Quality Education: education is the foundation to improving lives and sustainable development
Goal 5:	Gender Equality: a fundamental human right and a foundation for a peaceful and prosperous world
Goal 6:	Clean Water and Sanitation
Goal 7:	Affordable and Clean Energy
Goal 8:	Decent Work and Economic Growth: sustainable

- economic growth requires quality jobs
- Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure: investments are crucial to achieving sustainable development
- Goal 10: Reduced Inequality: policies should be universal in principle
- Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities: access to basic services, energy, housing, transportation and more
- Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
- Goal 13: Climate Action: a global challenge that affects everyone, everywhere
- Goal 14: Life Below Water: careful management is essential for a sustainable future.
- Goal 15: Life on Land: sustainably manage forests, biodiversity conservation, combat desertification/land degradation
- Goal 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions: access to justice for all, accountable institutions at all levels
- Goal 17: Partnerships to Achieve the Goal: revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

Source: United Nations 2015

The SDGs and their specific sub-targets involve a very wide spectrum of local and global development issues and challenges. As such, the SDGs provide fruitful opportunities to think about and design how the tourism industry could contribute positively to sustainable development in local destination communities, especially in the Global South, and global scale challenges such as climate change. In order to harness the tourism industry with the SDGs, the United Nations General Assembly established the ‘International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development’ in 2017 (UNWTO 2017). Based on this initiative, the industry was set to work towards three specific SDGs: (SDG 8) Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; (SDG 12) Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; and (SDG 14) Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. These kinds of goals are not anything new for sustainable tourism thinking, in general, but the SDGs can provide a fruitful and strong enough policy ground for workable sustainability innovation ecosystems for tourism.

Furthermore, tourism scholars have suggested that the industry could have the potential to contribute to many other SDGs and their targets (see Spenceley and Rylance, 2019; Rasoolimanesh et al. 2020). Based on this wider potential, Scheyvens (2018, p. 341) has called for tourism researchers “to consider how we might utilise the SDGs to analyse the linkages between tourism and sustainable development in a wide range of contexts and at different scales.” With regard to the context, the initial focus has been on the Global South, where tourism does have a potential to make a major difference. However, the need for decent work, for example, is a shared challenge in the Global South and North. Indeed, despite the geographical context we should study what kind of employment tourism creates (SDG8 and SDG10), for whom and at what social cost, and who is included in or excluded from development

based on tourism growth (SDG5 and SDG10), especially in the Global South (Saarinen 2020).

In relation to the scale, the emphasis has been on local- and destination-level policies and benefits. The local-scale focus is understandable as the host community and destination levels are the scales at which the impacts of tourism are the most concrete and prominent. However, sustainable development and the SDGs, as its specific current policy application, operate at the global scale. Thus, the benefits and costs of the tourism industry and related mobilities, for example, also need to be considered on a global scale (Gössling et al. 2016; Saarinen 2020): without doing so there is a real danger of ‘SDG-washing’ the negative aspects and externalities of the tourism industry, its global operations and growth. While tourism growth can benefit sustainable development at the local destination scale, the related mobility between tourists’ home regions and destinations creates negative externalities on a wider system level.

Therefore, in order not to have a major contradiction between delivering local benefits for SDGs and harmful impacts for the wider system and global climate change, for example, there needs to be an equitable and fair (and therefore uneven) division of labour between the Global North and South in creating carbon neutrality on a global scale. This is easy to state but it will call for radical changes, i.e. major policy innovations in the near future, if the growth of tourism is supported for the sake of its potential benefits to the SDGs in the Global South. In addition to the global scale zero-carbon imperative, and the related subvention models aiming for the goals of the Paris Agreement by limiting global warming preferably below 2 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels, this calls for highly inclusive modes of tourism development in the future.

<a>Discussion and conclusions

Sustainable development has a normative foundation, aiming to define and guide our actions towards public good and desired outcomes. This applies to the present context and the future, both locally and globally. At the same time, sustainable development aims to exclude practices and processes that are undesirable in relation to our long-term well-being and the use of natural and cultural resources. As such, the idea of sustainability was a major innovation for tourism development and planning in the late 1980s and 1990s. Since the early stages, there have been many beneficial changes in tourism towards sustainability. Most of the past developments in sustainable tourism, however, have been incremental by nature, based on local-scale design and applications. Instead of planning new and better technical solutions for sustainable development in tourism destinations and products alone, the scale of tourism growth calls for policy-level innovations that would guide the global tourism industry in the future. In this respect, the prospective connections between SDGs and the tourism industry offer fruitful avenues for developing sustainable tourism policies that would be in line with the idea of development as a process in which humanity and human capacity increases towards well-being and better lives. Obviously, after policy-level processing these kinds of radical and transforming social innovations in sustainable development in tourism need to be taken into practical use.

This calls for innovation ecosystems that operate on a global governance scale (Saarinen & Gill, 2019). Obviously, finding global scale solutions for the sustainability of tourism with material multiscale outcomes is not an easy task. It may be “an impossible dream”, as noted by Swarbrooke (1999, p. 41) for the existence of sustainability in tourism. However, we are increasingly aware of some of the main goals for sustainable development at the global scale: a demand for carbon neutrality in the future. Many countries are committed to be carbon neutral already in a foreseeable future. Finland, for example, aims to be carbon neutral by 2035 (Ministry of Environment, 2020) and the EU aims to be climate-neutral with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 (European Commission, 2020). No economic sector, including the tourism industry, can be left out from these aims and policies.

Obviously, global climate neutrality by the mid-century and locally inclusive development with economic growth and job creation is a highly challenging combo. This is an especially demanding task for the private sector industry mainly based on small and medium size (SMS) businesses dependent on global mobility that is – for a foreseeable future – largely based on the use of non-renewable resources of energy. In some sense the current scholarship in tourism studies concerning the post-COVID-19 world is closely related to the same type of dilemma on future tourism. If simplified, there are two discourses and critical questions on post-COVID-19 tourism: how global tourism can return to its pre-COVID-19 growth path or how should policy-makers utilise the situation to make the post-COVID-19 tourism development more sustainable than it was before (see Brouder 2020; Gössling, Scott and Hall 2020; Jones and Comfort 2020; Prideaux, Thompson, and Pabel 2020; Rogerson and Baum 2020; Saarinen 2021; Sigala 2020).

In relation to the SDGs we may paradoxically need to acknowledge these both needs and perspectives: the return to the growth path and resetting tourism towards sustainable development goals. However, this should take place with a different division of labour between the Global North and South. While the growth aspects with destination level sustainability principles are needed in the Global South, as we do not want to leave anyone behind, the tourism industry in the Global North may need to aim beyond carbon neutrality: towards carbon negative operations that create net negative emissions in future. Obviously, the global nature of the tourism industry with multinational businesses, operations and value chains makes it challenging to define what is North or South in some cases. What is clear, however, is that this kind of duplex combination will require radical policy and process changes towards better global governance in the tourism economy. These needed policy innovations and related innovation ecosystems should lead the tourism industry to carbon neutrality at the global scale and, thus, transform the industry to serve for sustainable development that would create human wellbeing in the Global South and the Global North.

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