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## Degrowing tourism: rethinking tourism

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### ABSTRACT

Concerns with growth have steadily advanced since the *Limits to Growth* report due particularly to human impacts on the natural environment. Since that time, neoliberal capitalism has become increasingly reliant on growth exacerbating these problems. The destructive outcomes of these strategies has led to a growing interest in degrowth. Analysts are examining how we can create economies that eschew a growth imperative while still supporting human thriving. Tourism as a key facet of capitalism is implicated in these issues and recent concerns with “overtourism” are only one symptom of the problem. This article presents a conceptual consideration of issues of degrowth in tourism. It examines current tensions in international mobility and argues just and sustainable degrowth will require greater attention to equity. This analysis suggests that essential to such an agenda is redefining tourism to focus on the rights of local communities and a rebuilding of the social capacities of tourism. This article argues for the redefinition of tourism in order to place the rights of local communities above the rights of tourists for holidays and the rights of tourism corporates to make profits.

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## Introduction

Concerns with growth have a long history, going at least as far back as the Club of Rome’s *Limits to Growth* report (Meadows et al., 1972). Since that time, neoliberal capitalism has become increasingly reliant on growth as the panacea to the crises it inevitably creates. The destructive outcomes of these strategies have led to a growing interest in degrowth. Degrowth analysis considers ways to create economies that eschew a growth imperative while still supporting human thriving (Kallis, 2011, p. 873). But recent events draw attention to a worsening of conditions and these require considered attention and analysis for the implications they may hold for achieving sustainable tourism futures.

The year of 2017 marked a watershed moment and not only because of the inauguration of Donald Trump to the United States presidency. Because of political crises caused by civil wars and conflicts, refugees amassed at the borders of Europe in large numbers and thereby threatened the globalisation project of the previous decades (Jazairy, 2017). In terms of tourism, images of refugee bodies washing up on Mediterranean holiday beaches confronted comfortable

middle class holidaymakers and highlighted divergent interpretations of what global mobility may mean for different people (Spiegel, 2015). At the same time, reports of overtourism indicated that the travel freedom of the mass tourists could no longer be taken for granted (Murison, 2017). Trump's America has placed a travel ban on people from certain (largely Muslim) countries purportedly to ensure American homeland security and locked up undesirable migrants in desert camps (Liptak, 2017; McKibben, 2018). These few cases suggest that mobility will be a key issue in social sustainability in the global future.

Fairness and justice are key facets to achieving degrowth that is socially sustainable (Muraca, 2012). Climate change, resource depletion, over-population and financial crises are likely to create more catalysts to population movements as the planet experiences greater numbers of political, environmental, economic and social refugees. Yet, we find borders being resurrected or strengthened and fervent nationalism as a response to the desperation of such peoples (seen for example, in Trump's border wall, the UK's Brexit decision and Hungary's crack down on asylum seeker transits). Simultaneously, tourists are sought in the competitive tourism marketplace to drive the endless growth that is the key to contemporary politics in many countries. This illustrates the discriminating applications of mobility in this era. Refugees are not welcome while tourism (for those privileged) is developed often without the consideration of its scale and overall impact on already overdeveloped destinations.

Reading tourism as an assertion of power and privilege, this article offers a conceptual analysis of the degrowth imperatives in tourism to demonstrate an entire rethinking of the phenomenon is required. The current situation is untenable. It is not possible to allow the mobility of the privileged for their discretionary travel needs while walling up borders for those who must move in order to survive. In this global world, we are arriving at a moment where the stark injustices are being made more apparent and impossible to ignore. This is the focus of this article.

Analysts of "sustainable tourism" and co-founders of *the Journal of Sustainable Tourism* Bramwell and Lane (2008) claimed in an editorial "While more researchers are beginning to look at the equality of tourism outcomes, there is still relatively little research on the wider issues of equity, fairness and social justice in tourism" (p. 2). This article addresses these gaps as relevant to considerations of degrowing tourism. This article responds to the challenge set by the Special Issue of the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* on degrowth in tourism: "To seriously pursue degrowth at both global and as well as most national levels, therefore, would likely require a drastic transformation of the tourism industry and its metabolism" (Fletcher et al., 2017). This article takes an unconventional narrative approach to accomplish these goals of illuminating issues of power and privilege in tourism which we argue underpin the problem that tourism presents. In the following sections, this article: reviews thinking on degrowth; demonstrates that tourism dynamics are currently based on a pro-growth ideology that results from neoliberal capitalism and this results in growing issues with overtourism; argues that applying a social justice lens to tourism reveals injustice in global mobilities which will necessitate a radical rethinking of the right to travel; reimagines tourism as defined by the rights of the local community as a part of such a radical rethinking project; and applies the eight steps proposed by Latouche for a degrowth transition to tourism to outline a reimagining of tourism. The contribution of this work is to present a radical conceptual argument: for equitable and sustainable degrowth in tourism to occur, tourism must be redefined and redesigned to acknowledge, prioritize, and place the rights of local communities above the rights of tourists for holidays and the rights of tourism corporates to make profits.

## Review of degrowth and tourism

Despite arguments made by advocates that tourism is a benign industry that makes an invaluable contribution to development (e.g. UNWTO, n.d.a), recent analysis suggests its impacts are

considerable and it has implications for efforts to try to secure long-term, wider sustainable development goals. Hall (2009, p. 53) made this point:

If tourism is to make a genuine contribution to sustainability then it becomes vital that there is greater public acknowledgement by industry and government of what the positive and negative impacts of tourism are, and thereby to see tourism as part of the larger socio-economic bio-physical system.

Hall was one of the first to link tourism sustainability to the larger degrowth movement. Hall argued: “sustainable tourism development is tourism development without growth in throughput of matter and energy beyond regenerative and absorptive capacities” (2009, p. 53). 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.

D’Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis (2015) argue: “The foundational theses of degrowth are that growth is uneconomic and unjust, that it is ecologically unsustainable and that it will never be enough” (p. 6). Demaria, Schneider, Sekulova and Martinez-Alier (2013) argued that degrowth emerged in the twentieth-first century “as a project of voluntary societal shrinking of production and consumption aimed at environmental sustainability” (p. 192), but evolved into a social movement with a focus of opposing economic growth.

According to *the Ecologist*, “the first international degrowth conference in Paris – 10 years ago this year – introduced the originally French activist slogan *décroissance* into the English-speaking world and international academia as ‘degrowth’” (The Ecologist, 2018). Knowledge of degrowth is derived from numerous disciplines including ecological economics, social ecology and economic anthropology, as well as social and environmental activism (Martinez-Alier, Pascual, Vivien, & Zaccai, 2010). Kallis (2011) asserts that degrowth “is a radical political project that offers a new story and a rallying slogan for a social coalition built around the aspiration to construct a society that lives better with less” (p. 873). It is open to debate about how radical a revolution degrowth will entail. There are also considerations of degrowth versus approaches such as post-growth, agrowth, steady-state economy, alternative well-being economics, and various forms of solidarity, and community economies addressing the options and practicalities (see Gerber & Raina, 2018). However, leading degrowth thinker Serge Latouche (2006) has explored the many terms and ideas related to degrowth thinking and argued that there is largely “[...] agreement on the re-evaluation our economic system needs, and on the values that we should bring to the fore” whether advanced by degrowth advocates, post-development thinkers, proponents of sustainable development, or green activists.

In his succinct assessment of “why growth can’t be green,” Hickel countered the argument that degrowth means deprivation: “But ending growth doesn’t mean that living standards need to take a hit. Our planet provides more than enough for all of us; the problem is that its resources are not equally distributed” (2018). This analysis indicates that equity issues are of prime significance to degrowth considerations. Particularly, questions arise on common but differential responsibilities and approaches that might be implemented in the countries of the Global North versus the Global South (see Gerber & Raina, 2018).

Latouche outlined eight interdependent steps to a degrowth transition: re-evaluate and shift values; re-conceptualize entrenched capitalist concepts; restructure production; redistributions at the global, regional and local scale; re-localize the economy; reduce; re-use; and recycle resources (cited in March, 2018, p. 1695). But these strategies cannot be approached as a toolkit, technological and market fix, but rather require a whole re-orientation of values and paradigm (March, 2018, p. 1695). This transformation of values is essential; “the de-growth camp would, in addition to physical critical issues, argue that downsizing is not just a matter of physically reducing throughput as it also involves decolonizing minds from economism” (Martinez-Alier et al., 2010, p. 1744). In this analysis, we take up a “decolonising” approach by offering a radically

different definition and focus to tourism that is conducive to overturning the growth fetish that currently features.

Because of tourism's considerable negative environmental impacts, it is an important sector for implementing degrowth strategies (Hall, 2009). Hall (2009) advocated a degrowth perspective to address transitioning tourism to a "steady-state economy" which he described as encouraging "qualitative development but not aggregate quantitative growth to the detriment of natural capital" (p. 57). Hall (2009) described degrowth as living within sustainable limits which is "... not so much connected to downsizing per se but to the notion of 'right-sizing'" (p. 55).

Yet contemporary tourism policy is predicated on growth (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018a). Corporate tourism plans repeatedly reference the growth of tourism. For instance, Tourism Australia's *Tourism 2020 Strategy* claimed:

Tourism 2020 focuses on improving the industry's performance and competitiveness by pursuing new opportunities for growth and addressing supply-side factors. The Tourism 2020 goal is to achieve more than \$115 billion in overnight spend by 2020 (up from \$70 billion in 2009 (Tourism Australia, n.d.).

Tourism authorities devise strategies to grow tourism markets, to increase tourism visitation, spur greater visitor spending and foster repeat visitation. This occurs because growth is the logic of neoliberal capitalism and it is essential for democratic governments to get re-elected. As Higgins-Desbiolles (2018a) described:

The structural context set by powerful corporations, subservient governments and consumerised citizenry needs to be understood. Politicians now think in short term election cycles and have become fetishist to growth, seeking corporate funding for their re-election campaigns and voter support for the jobs and growth they continually promise to deliver. Corporations have demanded in repayment for their largesse a reduction of barriers to business, elimination of "red tape" and a business-friendly investment environment; this means a hollowing out of the role of governments to use policy, legislation and regulations to govern for the public good, longer-term wellbeing of society and holistic sustainability (p. 158).

It occurs in tourism because tourism authorities are seeking to justify their share of the governmental budget and ensure that tourism economic portfolios are taken seriously as a contributor to the nation's economic development. The agenda for growth is set at the highest levels. While the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) proclaims interest in the socio-cultural contributions of tourism, all of its documents most strongly articulate the economic values. For example, the "why tourism?" webpage articulates current trends and developments as:

- International tourist arrivals grew by 7% in 2017 to 1323 million
- In 2017, international tourism generated US\$1.6 trillion in export earnings
- UNWTO forecasts a growth in international tourist arrivals of between 4% and 5% in 2018
- By 2030, UNWTO forecasts international tourist arrivals to reach 1.8 billion (UNWTO, n.d.a).

The UNWTO acts to promote "mainstreaming tourism in the development agenda" on the basis of these statistics (UNWTO, n.d.b).

As more and more developing countries follow a development trajectory seeking to attain western levels of consumption, the world community confronts a challenging equity issue in terms of the phenomenal growth in tourism consumption. As Hall (2009) noted, considering the serious negative environmental impacts of tourism, if we believe that ethics of equity should apply so that everyone can enjoy travel, we would find "there is not enough world for everyone to be the average North American or European long-haul tourist" (p. 53). The growing middle classes of populous countries such as India and China represent a lucrative opportunity for tourism multinationals and destination governments, but insufficient thought is given to equity, fairness, and justice in tourism consumption and the need to impose limits in the interests of safe futures as touring populations rise rapidly in an increasingly resource constrained world.

However, it is important to understand that the growth fetish of tourism is not new. Brian Wheeler offered critical and cutting edge analysis in 1993. Wheeler (1993) argued that the tourism industry appropriated the language of sustainability in order to achieve public relations outcomes: “while dovetailing perfectly with notions of a quality caring industry that has developed a self-rectifying mechanism, globally, it is patently obvious that the ‘bugger it up and pass it down’ [...] philosophy has been employed” (p. 125). He predicted the future of tourism as heading to “mega-mass tourism” as tourists numbers grew exponentially and travel destinations proliferated with the promotion of global tourism through intentional efforts. He identified the reality globally as “a capitalist society with inbuilt growth dynamics and a ‘get it while you can,’ grab mentality,” while the rhetoric of responsible tourism and sustainability was deployed to deceive with their “slow, steady, selfless, cosy, back to nature, sustainable, eco-friendly, controlled small-scale solution to tourism problems” (Wheeler, 1993, p. 126). He asserts that the proponents who advocate sustainable tourism as the answer to the problems of mass tourism are right:

Sustainable tourism does provide the answer. Unfortunately it is the wrong question. Rather than effectively addressing the complexities of tourism impact, what it is actually achieving is the considerably easier task of answering the question – ‘How best can we cope with the criticism of tourism impact?’ – as opposed to the impact itself (Wheeler, 1993, p. 122).

Wheeler’s analysis cautions us to be critically analytical of responsible tourism rhetoric and the campaigns the tourism industry proposes to address its sustainability challenges. Under the logic of neoliberal capitalism, the advocates of the tourism industry are unlikely to address the real issue of degrowing tourism and can be expected to deploy deceptive campaigns to divert attention from the critical challenges we confront.

A recent case of a promotional campaign by *Wonderful Copenhagen*, the official tourism organisation of the city of Copenhagen, Denmark, captured the inherent contradiction between the “veneer” of sustainability that is presented to gain support for tourism and the centrality of the growth agenda which is still at the core of tourism policy and planning. *Wonderful Copenhagen* promised the “end of the era of tourism” and launched a tourism strategy setting a course “towards a future beyond tourism” (Wonderful Copenhagen, 2017). Entitled “localhood,” the vision seems to promise an exemplar of degrowth, stating:

[...] we wish to co-create [...] a future destination where human relations are the focal point, where the differentiation between destination and home of locals is one and the same. A destination, where locals and visitors not only co-exist, but interact around shared experiences of localhood (2017, p. 10).

On closer examination when reading this strategy in full, this vision may be viewed as a case illustrative of Wheeler’s (1993) point outlined above. *Wonderful Copenhagen* acted much like any other Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) when it focused on the economic measurements typical of other DMOs. It claimed to go “[...] beyond bed-nights in measuring the industry’s value creation [...]” (2017, p. 16). Yet, this strategy contained the same emphasis on destination competitiveness, targeting of the lucrative business traveller, increasing visitor length of stay, encouraging repeat visitation, but most importantly growing new markets too, including the notorious cruise ship industry tourist. With critical reading, the localhood strategy of *Wonderful Copenhagen* was arguably a response to criticisms of overtourism in European city destinations, the homogenisation of urban destinations through globalisation and a consumer market fracturing in tastes and interests.

Ultimately, the mission of the localhood strategy of *Wonderful Copenhagen* was growth, as it aimed to “enable our destination to be shared more” (2017, p. 11). This was confirmed by its “marks of success,” with the first one being a revenue target of DKK 49 billion. It did couch this as “socio-economic revenue,” claiming this refocused on “broader societal impact” rather than a more narrow “tourism-economic revenue.” In the next paragraph it confessed “today, we have limited means and methods to measure broader value [...]” (p. 23). The second mark of success was to measure and target “citizen’s support of visitor *growth*” [emphasis added] at higher than

80% through “frequent studies to measure sentiments of the locals towards visitors” (p. 23). Clearly as a DMO, *Wonderful Copenhagen* was using localhood as an astute branding strategy to distinguish Copenhagen from other popular city destinations (see p. 13). The strategy sought local buy-in to this growth strategy with a concern to inform the citizenry of the city of the “socio-economic” value of hosting tourists in their locale and a tool of engagement through social surveying.

This was an astute if superficial reaction to the fact that overtourism indicates that local communities are becoming increasingly hostile to forms of tourism that are imposed on them and diminish the quality of life. 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). Higgins-Desbiolles understood overtourism in a context of carrying capacity, when she claimed:

Overtourism describes a situation in which a tourism destination exceeds its carrying capacity – in physical and/or psychological terms. It results in a deterioration of the tourism experience for either visitors or locals, or both. If allowed to continue unchecked, overtourism can lead to serious consequences for popular destinations (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018b).

This different emphasis matters as a carrying capacity approach suggests a notion that places sold as a tourism destinations have limits to the growth in terms of both physical and psychological attributes.

Despite appearances, overtourism did not arrive in public discourse out of nowhere. Significant to the development of overtourism has been the dominance of neoliberal ideology and the impacts it has had on economy and society. Harvey (2005) argued the neoliberal state empowers the corporate sector by ensuring a good business and investment climate leaving civil society as the site of resistance to the injustices that ensue (pp. 70–79). In the case of overtourism at tourism destinations such as Barcelona and Venice, it is the impacted, local community that has been activated for resistance (Burgen, 2018; Milano, 2018).

Understandings of overtourism should be situated in the wider context of tourism development being fostered by the capitalist economy system for profit accumulation of multinational corporations and the global elite (Fletcher, 2011; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008, 2018a). As Fletcher (2011) argued:

A small number of increasingly interrelated transnational tourism operators control much of the goods and services that tourists consume globally. In this respect, tourism expansion can be viewed as an instance of “accumulation through dispossession” that Harvey (2005) finds characteristic of neoliberal capitalism in general. These operators also control much of the advertising by which tourists are enticed to consume the products offered, Transnational tourism operators work hand-in-hand with other important tourism promoters, including international development agencies and national governments (p. 455).

Through this political economy lens we can see how overtourism occurs through the pressures of multinational tourism corporations and affiliated others, who press for pro-growth approaches to tourism development. They lack concern for the limits of carrying capacity that a particular destination might be subject to and in current neoliberal contexts of deregulation are not compelled to respect such limits. Fletcher (2018) indicated that capitalistic forms of tourism are not deterred from the critical crises that capitalism heralds for its dependence on the natural environment, particularly ecotourism. Fletcher viewed tourism “as a key pillar of the capitalist economy” and showed how tourism promoters will utilise strategies of “Anthropocene tourism and other forms of disaster capitalism as a ‘fix’ to stave off economic and environmental crises for as long as they are able” (2018, p. 11).

This capitalistic system of production in tourism is enabled by a consumerist dynamic that is never satiated and in fact seeks out newer and more novel tourism destinations and experiences (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010). Driven by restlessness, boredom and new ways to escape reality, tourists are perpetually seeking new experiences (Cohen, 1979; Graburn, 1989). The desire to seek

more and more novel ways of stimulating the senses through travel (as encouraged by the experience economy for example) continues to go unchallenged, perpetuating the growth fetish of tourism and underpinning the ability of tourism corporates to sustain profit agendas from tourism growth.

Through these dynamics outlined above, we can identify why pro-growth policies of tourism are enacted and understand how these result in overtourism in particular locales around the world (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018b). Next, we turn to the issue of tourists and the right to travel as an essential pillar to thinking through a socially sustainable approach to degrowth in tourism.

## Understanding tourism today through a social justice lens

The nature and significance of tourism has long been debated in tourism circles. One key transformation in understandings of tourism is the transition from notions of “tourism as a social force” (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006) to seeing tourism solely in terms of it as a business sector or “industry” (Smith, 1988, p. 183). As neoliberalism has gained dominance, conceptualisations of tourism as an industry has narrowed tourism education in such important ways that it constrains our thinking and action particularly in terms of understanding tourism as a moral domain (see Ayikoru, Tribe, & Airey, 2009). In effect, the phenomenon of tourism has been usurped by those seeking to direct it to profit accumulation and this has serious implications for the future of tourism under discussion here.

A newer way of defining tourism is through a mobilities approach. Hall (2008b) claims tourism can be interpreted as “an expression of lifestyle identified either through voluntary travel or a voluntary temporary short-term change of residence” (p. 7). This mobilities definition of tourism draws attention to how tourism can be understood by the dimensions of movement through space and time, as well as the number of trips a traveller undertakes (Hall, 2008a). Such an approach indicates the complexities of contemporary tourism, particularly how it now may overlap with everyday leisure, travel to second homes, diasporic travel, emigration, business travel, and medical travel. Hall (2008a) advocated the need for “[...] understanding the meaning behind the range of mobilities undertaken by individuals, not tourists [...] by extension, a new conceptualization and theoretical approach applied to tourism must consider relationships to other forms of mobility” (p. 15). Hall’s purpose here is to address new developments in tourism demand and destination competitiveness but for this discussion it exposes to us the fact that tourism is clearly the domain of the privileged. In fact, Hall could add a fourth dimension to his mobilities approach to tourism, that of money as the globally mobile are welcomed according to their ability to pay or invest in the destinations they desire (see for instance Smith, 2014). Tourism addresses voluntary and commodified travel while our world increasingly witnesses involuntary travel out of desperation.

The 2015 image of the lifeless Syrian toddler, Alan Kurdi, washed up on a Turkish beach helps us demarcate the lines between privilege and peril in this globalised world (Smith, 2015). These Aegean beaches are the transit routes through which Syrians, among many others, flee civil war and danger (See [Figure 1](#)). The holiday islands and coasts of the Mediterranean have become the frontline in this rubbing up of the privileged and the imperilled. This situation is recognised by those amenable to a justice lens. For instance, “Tourists go home, refugees welcome” featured on signs of a leftist group Arran Paisos Catalans in 2017 (Giaccaria, 2018). *The Guardian* newspaper reported:

Early last year, around 150,000 people in Barcelona marched to demand that the Spanish government allow more refugees into the country. Shortly afterwards, “Tourists go home, refugees welcome” started appearing on the city’s walls; soon the city was inundated with protestors marching behind the slogans “Barcelona is not for sale” and “We will not be driven out.”





**Figure 1.** Photo from “Tourists versus Refugees series, “Tourists taking a morning walk at the beach pass by abandoned life-jackets from refugees that arrived on the previous night,” August 2015, Kos, Greece. Copyright Jörg Brüggemann/OSTKREUZ. Used with permission.

What the Spanish media dubbed *turismofobia* overtook several European cities last summer [...] But in contrast to many, as fiercely as Barcelona has pushed back against tourists, it has campaigned to welcome more refugees. When news broke two weeks ago that a rescue ship carrying 629 migrants was adrift in the Mediterranean, mayor Ada Colau was among the first to offer those aboard safe haven (Borgen, 2018).

Giaccaria analysed these events:

Within the broader rise of anti-tourism feelings and practices, the Catalan protest is particularly meaningful as it establishes a connection between two forms of mobility that are at odds with each other: (Northern) tourism and (Southern) migration. Moreover, it subverts the common feeling about which kind of mobility is desirable and which one not. Anti-tourism protesters describe tourists as invaders who endanger the social and cultural (re)production of places (2018, p.1).

Justice-oriented scholarship is also beginning to address the issues of migration in relations to environmental change caused by climate change (e.g. White, 2011). We are already witnessing whole communities in the Arctic prepare to leave their homes and even whole countries, such as Tuvalu and Kiribati, becoming environmental refugees. This is the newest and perhaps gravest form of environmental injustice and environmental racism; it may also compound historical and colonial abuses (see Maldonado et al., 2013).

These few incidents briefly addressed here invite us to think about the mobilities of tourists versus the mobilities of vulnerable others through a lens of social justice as we consider possibilities of degrowth. This invites a consideration of the right to travel and tourism and how these are enacted.

The rights to travel and tourism were derived in the twentieth century in developed countries from workers’ rights and pressures to legislate leave entitlements (see Higgins-Desbiolles,

2006). This led to the incorporation of the right to travel being in key international documents including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966, the World Tourism Organization's Tourism Bill of Rights and Tourist Code of 1985, and the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism of 1999. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has two passages that underpin the right to travel, articles 13 (2) and 24. Article 13, section 2 states "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country" (UN, 1948), which O'Byrne describes as underpinning the human right to travel (2001, pp. 411–413). Combined with article 24 which states "everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay" (UN, 1948), this important pillar of our human rights structure is credited with situating travel and tourism as part of our human rights regime. This was justified because of tourism's potential value: as the UNWTO asserted, tourism is vital for "[...] contributing to economic development, international understanding, peace, prosperity and universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all [...]" (UNWTO, 1999).

However, clearly this human right is not universally enjoyed and there is a clear divide between the developed and developing worlds in this respect. But before the neoliberal order took hold, there was some rhetoric concerning the need to promote greater equity. For instance, the Manila Declaration of the UNWTO in 1980 declared in its opening statements:

Convinced [...] that world tourism can contribute to the establishment of a new international economic order that can help to eliminate the widening economic gap between developed and developing countries and ensure the steady acceleration of economic and social progress, in particular of the developing countries,

Aware that world tourism can only flourish if based on equity [...] and if its ultimate aim is the improvement of the quality of life and the creation of better living conditions for all peoples [...] (UNWTO, 1980).

Once neoliberalism held sway, the UNWTO formulated the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (UNWTO, 1999), which still continued such lofty and idealistic rhetoric but added more practical value by enunciating the roles and responsibilities of all of the various stakeholders in tourism (e.g. tourists, the industry, governments, and "host" communities). This code was forged in the new era brought with the demise of communism and the triumph of neoliberalism; and so not surprisingly, its preamble states:

[...] the world tourism industry as a whole has much to gain by operating in an environment that favours the market economy, private enterprise and free trade and that serves to optimize its beneficial effects on the creation of wealth and employment (UNWTO, 1999).

Reflecting concerns contemporaneous with its creation, it acknowledged the need to balance economic development with environmental protection and alleviation of poverty, and thus was informed by the sustainability discourse of the 1990s. But more surprisingly, it advocated government support of initiatives such as "social tourism" and other processes to promote access to tourism for potential disadvantaged groups in their societies such as the people with disabilities, youth, seniors and families. This was surprising that such rhetoric had survived into the era of neoliberalism. However, because there is no mention of the New International Economic Order in this document (unlike the Manila Declaration), it failed to address how such inclusivity and equity might be achieved. One can only assume that each government's ability to fulfil its "social tourism" obligations to its citizenry and thus make real their citizens exercise of their "right to tour" is dependent upon them obtaining sufficient levels of development to make conditions possible to fulfil such obligations. The only statement this code made about obligations to development in the countries of the developing world was a call that:

Multinational enterprises of the tourism industry should not exploit the dominant positions they sometimes occupy [...] they should involve themselves in local development, avoiding, by the excessive repatriation of

their profits or their induced imports, a reduction of their contribution to the economies in which they are established (UNWTO, 1999, article 9).

Considering the *raison d'être* of these enterprises is profit and/or returns to their shareholders, this is patently insufficient to direct tourism to developmental outcomes for local communities.

Bianchi and Stephenson (2014) have comprehensively considered free movement of people and the right to travel and concluded:

[...] while international travel is said to be uniquely able to foster peace, development and social harmony among human beings, neoliberal discourses of "tourism as freedom" and by association, free trade, simultaneously underplay and exacerbate the material inequalities and unequal power relations that determine people's ability to enjoy freedom of movement and the right to travel (p. 139).

Situating tourism in terms of considerations of justice, Higgins-Desbiolles (2018c) advocated:

The justice of a full mobilities approach to human travel rather than facilitating privileged tourists. Global environmental change, the conflicts induced by increasing precarities and the desire to secure better livelihoods seem set to compel human movement on an unprecedented scale. In such a context, a goal of dismantling the UNWTO and replacing it with a UN agency for the right to mobility will become more imperative (p.7).

Higgins-Desbiolles (2018c) and Bianchi and Stephenson (2014) failed to address the fact that there are currently two bodies charged with international mobility, the UNWTO and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The latter is described as "the leading international agency working with governments and civil society to advance the understanding of migration issues, encourage social and economic development through migration, and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants" (IOM, n.d.). The UNWTO has published a report on "Tourism and Migration" (2009) that analysed the linkages between tourism and migration and the opportunities that emerge to grow and develop tourism opportunities (such as communities living in diaspora representing lucrative tourism niches or the remittance workers on cruise ships sending monies home to developing country communities). That is of course the remit of the UNWTO as an organisation. What this analysis illuminates though is that such a myopic focus is no longer tenable in a resource- constrained world subject to coming upheavals induced by climate change, conflict and economic crises. Mobilities can no longer be de-coupled if degrowth is to be achieved. Taking Higgins-Desbiolles' call for a "full mobilities approach" (2018c), this analysis suggests that if degrowth is to be socially sustainable in a globalised and mobile world, tourism degrowth must come to terms with issues of equity and justice in access to mobility.

## Reimagining tourism and justifying it

Higgins-Desbiolles (2007) addressed issues of privilege and peril inspired by the impacts of the "9/11" attacks and the subsequent war on terror. She turned to the work of Frantz Fanon for understanding how the powerful and privileged exert themselves to ensure their ability to dominate and exploit and also how resistance to such domination might occur. Fanon's *The wretched of the earth* has been described as "the greatest masterpiece of the anti-colonial struggle" (Sartre, 1967). Its content "On violence" has a warning for our times as the catalysts to violence are growing.

Fanon (1967) recorded how the colonisation process features the colonisers dehumanising of the "natives." Fanon (1967) argued that because colonisation represents relentless violence, decolonisation struggles must be willing to resort to violence. As the colonisers work to displace the native in settler colonisation, the natives are sparked into violent resistance because they react to their dehumanisation. Settler colonialism ensures that the natives understand their situation and deprivations: "[...] on the level of immediate experience, the native who has seen the modern world penetrate into the furthestmost corners of the bush, is most acutely aware of all

the things he does not possess” (Fanon, 1967, p. 58). Additionally, the colonised natives are aware that their oppression can only be overturned by a resort to violence: “we have seen that it is the intuition of the colonised masses that their liberation must, and can only, be achieved by force” (Fanon, 1967, p. 57).

The events of Barcelona recounted above resulting in the label of “tourism phobia” (Milano, 2018; Burgen, 2018) concentrate our minds on the potential for violence from these injustices that are increasingly brought into juxtaposition. Milano (2018), who also focused on the issues of “tourism phobia” in Barcelona, argued that the solutions to issues caused by tourism are not only technical but also political, and specifically, “it is necessary to propose structural changes to the economic model in which the tourist phenomenon is currently embedded” (p. 560. *Translated by the authors*). If we are to avoid violence, strategies for degrowth in tourism must be progressive, inclusive, just and equitable. This begins with the redefinition of tourism in order to place the rights of local communities above the rights of tourists for holidays and the rights of tourism corporates to make profits.

This article has featured diverse definitions of tourism. To achieve the goal of just degrowth in tourism, tourism must be redefined. Current textbook definitions often focus on the tourists and the nature of their demand and/or the industry that supplies them through products and services (e.g. Wall & Mathieson, 2006). Tourism for sustainability and degrowth must focus on the needs and interests of the local community; what tourism industry interests have usurped for themselves under the label of the “host community.” A redefined tourism could be described as: the process of local communities inviting, receiving and hosting visitors in their local community, for limited time durations, with the intention of receiving benefits from such actions. Such forms of tourism may be facilitated by businesses operating to commercial imperatives or may be facilitated by non-profit organisations. But in this restructure of tourism, tourism operators would be allowed access to the local community’s assets only under their authorisation and stewardship (See Figure 2).

A model of such a way of re-orienting tourism can be found in the Statute on Tourism in Kuna Yala. Kuna Yala (now Guna Yala) is an Indigenous province of Panama that has historically experienced imposition of tourism by central government authorities and the tourism industry (Bennett, 1999). The first article of the Statute declared:

The only tourist activities and infrastructures possible in Kuna Yala will be, strictly and solely, those that respect, conserve, value, and defend the natural resources, environment and biodiversity of the comarca [reservation], as well as the sociocultural, political, and religious Kuna norms and customs (Snow, 2001, p. 2).

Snow (2001) described this as: “[...] represent[ing] a carefully planned strategy to direct the tourism industry to the needs of the entire Kuna nation” (p. 1). The thrust of this law was to prevent outside investment in Kuna lands, assert full control over tourism projects and subject all Kuna tourism projects to an approval process of the Kuna General Congress (Bennett, 1999). It is important to note here that the Kuna first reacted with violence against tourists imposed on their communities by the Panamanian central government and the tourism industry, before asserting their rights through the Statute (Bennett, 1999). More recent research has shown that the Kuna have been able to eliminate tourism intermediaries and thereby retain more of the benefits of tourism for themselves but even more importantly present a model of local empowerment and full sharing of the tourism opportunity and its benefits (Pereiro, de Leon, Martinez Mauri, Ventocilla, & del Valle, 2012, p. 33). Another example is the Yolngu Aboriginal community’s Lirrwi Tourism which asserts Yolngu authority over tourism and its conduct on their country (see Lirrwi Tourism, n.d.).

Whether such an entire re-orientation of the phenomenon is possible is of course a real issue. A historical success that showed a more modest but no less important assertion of community interests was the Tourism Optimisation Management Model (TOMM) developed on the leadership of the community of Kangaroo Island who wanted to ensure that mass tourism

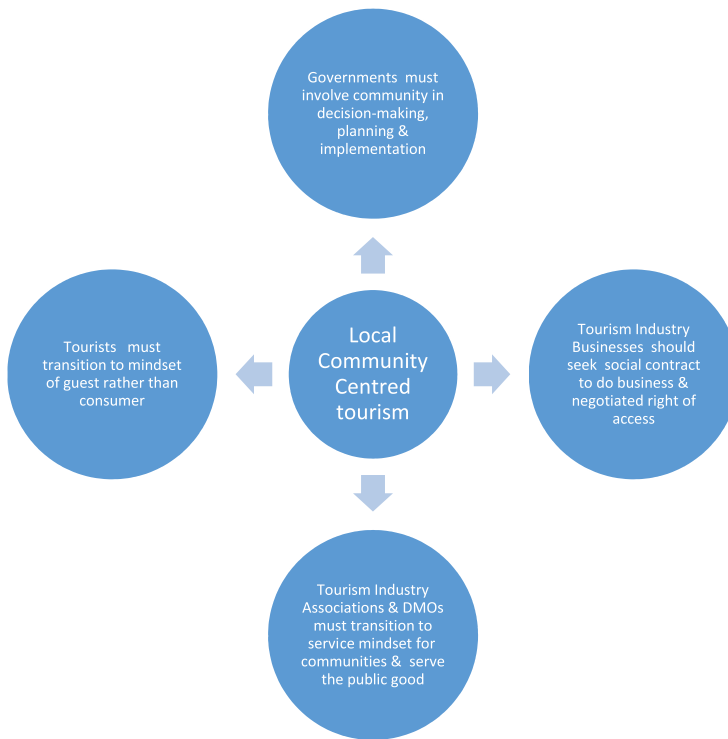


Figure 2. Community-Centred Tourism Framework as a mechanism for degrowing tourism.

developments did not diminish their quality of life (see Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005). The example set by TOMM could be taken up as a means to practically implement steady state approaches to tourism, if not degrowth approaches, as it sought community indicators of tourism impacts and ecological indicators to counter balance the more pro-growth economic indicators and tourism experiential indicators with the aim to develop responsive sustainable approaches to tourism.

There are many diverse contributions on how tourism can be made more sustainable which are more easily realised pathways to degrowing tourism. Recently, new trends including *buen vivir*, localism and slow tourism have made important contributions and potentially with real commitment could contribute to efforts towards degrowth.

*Buen Vivir*, or living well, is one example of a movement to abandon measures of prosperity based on gross domestic product for measures of peoples' total well-being. One example studied in tourism is that of Nicaragua. Fisher (2018) found:

Nicaragua's *Vivir Bonito*, *Vivir Bien* is a hopeful, practical, and – yes – ideological response to a cluster of challenges that are at once endogenous, hemispheric and global. Its central concern is the many social and ecological pathways that comprise and erode collective well-being [...] In contemporary Nicaragua, as that conversation moves away from the narrow focus on markets and makes space for *Buen Vivir*, it will be even more important to consider how those relationships between hosts and guests, citizens and states, communities and environments, are figured and refigured, as well as how different histories, political ecologies and socio-ecological imaginaries give rise to new varieties of tourism development (p. 16).

This example of *buen vivir* reinforces that resistance to corporatised tourism and its growth agendas can also be found in articulations of tourism as a social force (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). Bhutan's policy and programmes based on "gross national happiness" (GNH) offer a comparable approach to *buen vivir*. As Gerber and Raina (2018, p. 357) demonstrate, Bhutan's GNH offers a

practical example with the indicators of the GNH Screening Tool and the activities of the GNH Commission to build an economy based on concepts of sufficiency rather than growth.

Higgins-Desbiolles argued that social tourism and its facilitators such as the International Bureau of Social Tourism show how tourism should be in the service of human needs rather than appropriated for corporate profits and a growth agenda (2006, p. 1200). One example of a form of social tourism that would be very well suited to a degrowth tourism paradigm is that suggested by David Barkin for Mexico (2000). Mexico has been an exemplar of a country using corporatized tourism focusing on international tourists, a growth-pole strategy and mega-resorts as its approach to tourism development (Barkin, 2000; Torres & Momsen, 2005). Barkin (2000) advocated a more sustainable approach for rural livelihoods, sustainable resource management and social well-being through a mass domestic tourism approach. His work documented a number of local initiatives that featured efforts in “[...] integrating tourism into a more balanced program of productive development” (Barkin, 2000, p. 16). The form of tourism he advocated was domestic social tourism in rural communities, such as having urban school groups hosted in rural communities of Mexico for educational tours. Barkin (2000) claimed:

The alternative model examined here offers an important counterweight with considerable benefits for rural communities and the Mexican working class. It would contribute substantially to breaking down some of the obstacles to building a more balanced national society. A program of socially oriented tourism would open a new model for decentralised development that would respond to urgent needs of present-day society. Well organized, it could be financed more readily than the international model and offers more employment and an inexpensive way to improve the quality of life for both consumers and providers (p. 19).

Barkin (2000) in fact offered some points of advice for a “tourism program as part of a strategy for autonomous sustainable resource management” that are recommended for anyone concerned with degrowth in tourism, including the “recognition of the local communities as the rightful claimants to speak for and benefit from any program that protects and exploits local resources” (pp. 17–18).

There are also opportunities offered by different models, including not for profit social enterprises (i.e. Iorgulescu & Răvar, 2015) and tourism cooperatives (i.e. Vocatch, 2010). Perhaps most radical of all, is the take-over of bankrupted hotels by workers and their operation under workers’ cooperatives models such as the case of the Hotel Bauen in Buenos Aires, Argentina (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2012). Higgins-Desbiolles (2012) argued that the “Hotel Bauen provides a powerful counter pedagogy to capitalist globalization’s assertion that ‘there is no alternative’ [...] and] can reverse the logic of capitalism” (pp. 636–637).

These examples indicate that challenges to the corporate agenda of seizing tourism for profits and growth have a long and impressive pedigree. The struggle for power and control over tourism is serious and so far, the usurpers have had sound success in making us forgetful and neglectful of those thought leaders and actors that came before us. Today though the crises and the challenges that lay before us are so serious that renewed resistance is essential. Reclaiming tourism for human needs, within the wider context of autonomous sustainable resource management and allocation of wider goods and bads of development, is essential for any program planning degrowth in tourism.

As a final implement for analysis, degrowth analyses offer guidance in degrowing tourism. As previously stated, Latouche suggested eight “r’s” for a degrowth transition (March, 2018, p. 1695). These provide guidance on how to transition to degrowth but as cautioned earlier must be in a context of a whole re-orientation of paradigm (March, 2018, p. 1695). These can offer an approach to considerations of degrowing tourism.

- Re-evaluate and shift values:  
Currently, tourism is defined as the business of supplying tourists with products and services or the travel motivations of tourists and the nature of their demand. This needs to be

changed. In the interest of equity and justice, tourism should be better defined as the voluntary hosting of visitors in local communities for the benefit of locals (and second, tourists). Shifting the values of tourism away from excessive commodification and exploitation is essential. Tourism must be returned to ideas of hospitality and connection. The recent work on tourism as a social force (i.e. Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006; papers of the Critical Tourism Studies 2013 conference) may provide some guidance on this. Moreover, we need to re-think how we evaluate the benefits of tourism focusing on the local community and going beyond the fragile economic benefits offered by multinational corporations with their propensity to leakages. Furthermore evaluation of tourism impacts needs to take into consideration that the tourism habits of the developed world have unjust environmental impacts on the developing world, as seen for example in climate change impacts. Finally, understandings of hospitality might benefit from a critical engagement with Derrida's challenging expositions on hosts, guests, hostility, and hospitality found within his considerations of the possibilities of (un)conditional hospitality (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000).

- Re-conceptualize entrenched capitalist concepts:  
The UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (1999) admonishes corporations to avoid extracting too much profit from their enterprises. This is idealistic rhetoric that acts as public relations spin under a system where profit extraction is the purpose of such corporations. For tourism to achieve degrowth targets, the growth agenda pursued by tourism agencies will have to be abandoned. Tourism corporations will have to accept the essential role that governmental regulation for sustainability and the public good plays and halt their advocacy for reductions in these activities as "redtape" and blocks to their development ambitions. In fact, governments could review the structures of their tourism industries encouraging, if not enforcing organisations to follow sustainable social enterprise models such those presented by Mottiar, Boluk, and Kline (2018). This would facilitate the shift from exploitative approaches performed by multinational corporations to community partnership and empowerment approaches. Furthermore, another entrenched capitalist concept to be addressed regard the excessive and compulsive consumption of tourism by some social groups which should be tackled by an educational process towards ethical consumption (Weeden & Boluk, 2014).
- Restructure production:  
Multinational corporations cannot be allowed to extract excessive profits through their ability to command terms of trade through their power in the global value chains of production in tourism, particularly when international agreements such as the General Agreement on Trade in Services cedes enormous power to them. Barkin's (2000) analysis of the role for sustainable domestic social tourism in Mexico offers one example to consider. This explored a restructure of tourism away from unsustainable forms of growth models based on international tourism to more sustainable and beneficial forms of tourism based on domestic tourism for sustainable livelihoods and community well-being. Moreover, the development of new products should be led by grassroots movements and the local community instead of being designed and imposed by external organisations and corporations such as the case of El Gouna in the Red Sea area of Egypt that has been designed and built by the multinational corporation Orascom Hotels and Development (Vignal, 2010).
- Redistributions at the global, regional and local scale:  
The right to travel will need to be rethought in the coming era of immense global upheaval caused by global climate change. The rights of tourists for holidays will have to be weighed as inferior to the rights of environmental and conflict refugees for temporary and permanent safe haven. This can be addressed through redistribution of access to mobility based on terms of justice and equity rather than wealth and ability to pay. The two bodies charged with addressing mobility at the international level, the Office for International Migration and the UNWTO, will have to be totally revamped under new charters for a new era.

Alternatively or additionally, the international community could commit to a renewed vision of the NIEO and redistribute wealth, capacity, and technology to work towards alleviating some of the conditions that cause forced migration and undermine long-term sustainability.

- Re-localize the economy:

Tourism has already embraced re-localisation as a strategy, superficially in “buy local” campaigns and more fully in neolocalism movements. The latter offers opportunities to critically analyse how the global community can negotiate pathways to post-carbon economies and transition to sufficiency economies. Neolocalism concentrates focus on the role of local production, distribution and consumption in building networks of well-being, can link people to their environment and contribute to deeper levels of understanding to support actions at personal and political levels to address climate change (Cavaliere, 2017).

The key for tourism degrowth, however, will be to embed this strategy in a more sustainable and holistic approach to sustainable development that moves beyond current approaches to “sustaining tourism” (see Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018a). Essential to this task is ensuring tourism development is only one pillar to building a diverse economy; an economy dedicated to the subsistence and well-being of its people rather than articulating to the global capitalist economy and neoliberal market system. We must abandon moves toward tourism-dependent economies as these are the antithesis of sustainable and just economies.

- Reduction, re-use and recycling of resources:

Hall (2009) addressed this in his discussion of degrowth in tourism when he noted: “sustainable tourism development is tourism development without growth in throughput of matter and energy beyond regenerative and absorptive capacities” (p. 53). This may already be addressed at a local enterprise or local site level. But this challenge should be taken up at a much broader level. One example is the “half earth” proposal (Wilson, 2016) that argues we must put whole swathes of the ecological environment under protection and conservation, with human use and access banned; even that most “benign” of industries, tourism. When tourism comes to grips with requirements that it can no longer appropriate landscapes, cultures, and peoples in a finite and stressed world, we would have stepped up to this challenge in a more meaningful manner. Concepts of reduction, re-use, and recycling in tourism are still to be more strongly embedded in carrying capacity theories. New approaches to the topic have been proposed with a new index on urban resources and environment carrying capacity by Zhang, Liu, Wu, and Wang (2018). Additionally, Muler-Gonzalez, Coromina, and Gali (2018) have proposed merging carrying capacity theory with social exchange theory where the resources identified are not only physical but also social and cultural. However, we urge academia to review the concepts of carrying and absorptive capacities in light of the current environmental and political challenges that confront us. The necessity to reduce, re-use, and recycle should also be embedded on tourism education in a push for the (trans)formation of people’s consumption behaviours in tourism.

The final critical question to address is how do we turn tourism away from the power agendas that support growth dynamics? There is a full research and action agenda to pursue to accomplish this. Changing tourism education is essential so that future leaders of tourism policy and planning understand tourism in terms of a moral endeavour and in terms of its value for human well-being. Recent work on pedagogies that are critical and transformative are promising in this regard (Boyle, Wilson, & Dimmock, 2015; Boluk & Carnicelli, *in press*; Carnicelli & Boluk, *in press*; Hales & Jennings, 2017; Phi, Whitford, Dredge, & Reid, 2017). Additionally, progressive tourism developments would benefit from thinking through tourism in a context of citizenship; concerns with responsible tourism and responsibility in tourism and the influence that the NGOs that once championed these no longer have the profile they once had. Do degrowth approaches necessitate changing the industry substantially; instead of privileging unsustainable international tourism why are we not prioritising domestic tourism, social tourism and more local forms



of travel? Finally, are we ready to change politics? Degrowth necessitates resisting neoliberals push to hollow out governments and their responsibilities to govern for the public good.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to examine the possibility of equitable and sustainable degrowth in tourism through conceptual analysis. This resulted in a redefinition of tourism, prioritising the rights of local communities above the rights of tourists for holidays and the rights of tourism corporates to make profits. Solutions offered by the corporate tourism industry are unlikely to resolve the tensions of tourism that occur as we confront the limits to growth our planet faces. Recently, Hickel (2018) reviewed the arguments for “green growth” in an analysis that followed on from the outcomes of three major empirical studies addressing the possibilities of decoupling gross domestic product from resource use. Hickel’s review concluded that this is impossible on a global scale and that the promise of green growth is an illusion. Hickel stated:

Ultimately, bringing our civilization back within planetary boundaries is going to require that we liberate ourselves from our dependence on economic growth—starting with rich nations. This might sound scarier than it really is. Ending growth doesn’t mean shutting down economic activity—it simply means that next year we can’t produce and consume more than we are doing this year. It might also mean shrinking certain sectors that are particularly damaging to our ecology and that are unnecessary for human flourishing, such as advertising, commuting, and single-use products (2018).

Tourism is arguably one of those “unnecessary” activities and despite claims to the contrary can be quite damaging to our ecology with its current rapacious practices fostered by a neoliberal growth paradigm. In a resource-constrained and stressed world, tourism will have to justify its existence by offering more benefits and value than it currently does. This analysis has offered some considerations of how tourism’s growth agendas are symptomatic of tourism’s inequity and injustice. To overturn these injustices and place tourism on a degrowth trajectory, it will be necessary to redefine tourism and to place tourism within its appropriate context of global mobilities, human well-being and sustainable futures. Tourism should be reclaimed from an industry that has defined it as a business sector for their profit accumulation, to a human endeavour based on the rights and interests of local communities in welcoming tourists. The conflicts represented by overtourism are a wake-up call; pursuing equitable and just degrowth strategies will be increasingly vital if tourism is to have a sustainable future.

## Disclosure statement

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