
2 Sustainability and Neolocalism: Complementary Ideologies

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Abstract

This chapter introduces neolocalism as a valuable tool in the sustainability toolbox. Neolocalism, often considered the opposition to globalisation, has the potential to support ecologically and culturally appropriate tourism development grounded in place attachment. While slow progress is being made by tourism industries, ethical change can be seen at local levels, embraced and enhanced by entrepreneurs and destinations that value their unique attributes. This chapter intends to navigate these changes as a means to spotlight the evolution of sustainable tourism and situate neolocalism as the latest progression in a movement that is gaining momentum. By reviewing a brief history of sustainability thought, and explaining the role of the experiential, knowledge-based, and creative economies, this chapter encourages optimism for tourism destinations. As sustainable tourism evolves and scholars acknowledge the emergence of sustainable mass tourism, there is pressure for destinations to move beyond the green growth approach to tourism. The adoption of neolocalism could facilitate exciting opportunities that support the three pillars of sustainability.

Introduction

While globalisation has contributed to the growth of tourism, overtourism has contributed to the loss of place distinctiveness and identity (Ginting et al., 2017), in addition to environmental degradation, habitat fragmentation and negative socio-cultural impacts (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). As awareness of the inequities, damage, and unsustainability from mass tourism increases, more and more tourists seek to experience travel destinations in new ways. These trends have led to the introduction of neolocalism into tourism development as travellers aspire to immerse themselves in the ‘distinctively local’ in an effort to have an ‘authentic’ experience. Rather than have their vacation shaped by mass tourism enclaves and staged experiences controlled by tourism providers (Mody & Koslowsky, 2019), while simultaneously avoiding the negative impacts associated with mass tourism (Archer et al., 2005), many tourists are seeking authentic, local, and place-based activities that provide holistic connections to the places they visit. It is not surprising that destinations are moving to neolocalism as a way to embrace these consumer trends. This transition has fostered new partnerships, enhanced the tourism offer, and instilled a new sense of local ownership over the identity and authenticity of tourism products, messages, and experiences (Litzky et al., 2016).

This chapter introduces neolocalism as a valuable tool in the sustainability toolbox. Neolocalism, often considered the opposition to globalisation, has the potential to support ecologically and culturally appropriate tourism development grounded in place attachment (Wright & Eaton, 2018). One of the strengths of the neolocal movement lies in its focus on reclaiming and revitalising the uniqueness of a tradition, craft, or the sense of place of a locality. By utilising creative talents that embrace cultural and environmental aspects of community, neolocalism provides a valuable lens through which to reflect on sustainable tourism to date.

While Higgins-Desbiolles (2010) expresses frustration with the slow progress being made by tourism industries, ethical change can be seen at local levels, embraced and enhanced by entrepreneurs and destinations that value their unique attributes. This chapter intends to navigate these changes as a means to spotlight the evolution of sustainable tourism and situate neolocalism as the latest progression in a movement that is gaining momentum. By reviewing a brief history of sustainability

thought, and explaining the role of the experiential, knowledge-based, and creative economies, this chapter argues that all hope is not lost. Ceccarelli (2019) contends that through collaboration and innovation, neolocalism can encourage critical debate and find alternatives that address current weakness in traditional mass tourism development.

This chapter begins with an overview of sustainability as a means to frame the debate surrounding the negative influences of modern tourism. Using an historical narrative reminds readers that sustainability is both an old concern and a new paradigm, one that is ever changing and advancing. Even as the United Nations moves from the Millennium Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals, emphasis is placed on appropriate levels of development that can improve the quality of life for residents, yet conserve traditional resources, and include new ideas, perceptions, and alternative development frameworks. Cultural tourism, one of the fastest growing components of tourism (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2018), supports creative economies and product development, which in turn assists in the promotion of neolocal development and marketing (Holtkamp et al., 2016). Richards (2009) argues that neolocalism may, in fact, put the power of commodification into the hands of the very people who value authenticity, allowing for local construction of the inherent value and meaning of authenticity as communities change, evolve, and negotiate their identity over time. Yet, as we face challenges to sustainability, this chapter argues that neolocalism can support social and human capital development, which has the potential to support sustainability.

As our knowledge grows, so does our ability to facilitate change. By way of a new approach to sustainable tourism, there is much still unknown about the consequences and pitfalls of neolocal development. However, this chapter hopes to situate neolocalism in the ongoing discussion surrounding future development paths and appropriate development patterns. While tourism has many inherently negative consequences, a wanderlust for the world will always provide economic opportunities to exploit the less fortunate. Therefore, neolocalism seems well poised to put power into local hands and encourage greater participation in the decision-making process.