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Environmental Responsibility

infinite growth of material consumption in a finite world is an impossibility.

Schumacher¹

Although Responsible Tourism and the sustainability agenda cannot be reduced to the green agenda, the environmental challenges that confront us are pressing and serious, and will become more pressing as we encounter the limits to growth. Inevitably, this chapter addresses climate change and tourism, but the environmental agenda is not exclusively about the use of fossil fuels and emissions of greenhouse gases. There are other issues which must also be considered. Tourism, like other industries, causes pollution – light and noise, solid and liquid waste, and through the consumption of water and fossil fuels – and it destroys natural habitats through infrastructure development and use of construction materials. Species are consumed as souvenirs and food, and tourism may introduce exotics – invasive flora and fauna which may negatively affect the local ecology. The leisure and recreational activities of tourists – skiing, climbing, diving, wildlife viewing, snorkelling, yachting and a host of others – all have environmental impacts which need to be managed. In theory, tourism can contribute to conservation and the maintenance of biodiversity, but ecotourism remains little more than a good idea. There are major gains to be had by greening businesses but the case for certification, or green labelling, is less robust. The chapter concludes by looking at recent campaigns on animal welfare and asking what responsible aviation might look like.

Living in a finite world

At the first UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, Maurice Strong, the Secretary-General of the conference said “the Conference was launching a new liberation movement to free men from the threat of their thralldom to environmental perils of their own making.” Strong added that

¹ In *Small is Beautiful*, first published in 1973

this was only possible “if there was a new commitment to liberation from the destructive forces of mass poverty, racial prejudice, economic injustice, and the technologies of modern warfare ...the physical interdependence of all people required new dimensions of economic, social and political interdependence”.² The Club of Rome, founded in 1968, published *Limits to Growth* in 1972. It explored how exponential growth interacts with finite resources, arguing that population growth was out-stripping supplies of food and other natural resources.³ Their work has been, and for some still is, controversial, dismissed as a doomsayers’ charter,⁴ although as a number of studies have shown the original forecasts have proved remarkably accurate: Turner demonstrated that recent data compared favourably with key features of the business-as-usual scenario presented in *Limits to Growth*.⁵ In the UN system, the oxymoron of sustainable development is increasingly recognised and the emphasis is now being placed on an inclusive green economy and green growth. Whether this is a genuine paradigm shift or just a new spin is being debated.⁶

In 2002, thirty years on from the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment, the Cape Town Declaration called for negative environmental impacts to be minimised, for tourism to make a positive contribution to the conservation of natural heritage and to the maintenance of the world’s diversity. According to the Cape Town Declaration, environmental concerns should be managed “throughout the life cycle of tourist establishments and operations – including the planning and design phase”. It also called for the sustainable use of resources, and for waste and over-consumption to be reduced; for tourism and tourist activities to be managed within the environment’s capacity to absorb them without damage; and for tourism to be used to promote environmental education and awareness amongst tourists.⁷

Krippendorf’s first book, *Die Landschaft Fresser (The Landscape Devourers)*, was about the problems of tourism in the Alps in 1975. It is only necessary to visit parts of the Alps and the Mediterranean coast to understand the transformation wrought on the landscape by tourism, particularly in areas which attract large numbers of holidaymakers and second-home owners. Tourism takes place in all of the world’s different environments: in deserts and rainforests, on and around lakes, rivers and seas, in the mountains and deep canyons,

2 Strong (1972): 34-36

3 Meadows, Meadows, Randers and Behrens(1972)

4 Nørgård, Peet and Ragnarsdóttir (2010)

5 Turner (2008)

6 Bowen and Fankhauser (2011) and Lorek and Spangenberg (2014)

7 Cape Town Conference (2002): 4

on snow and sun-soaked beaches. Most of the potential environmental impacts are local: the issues vary from place to place and different forms of tourism and tourist activities have different impacts. Fundamental to Responsible Tourism is the principle that the destination belongs to the people who live there, and their descendants. It follows from this – and it was enshrined in the Cape Town Declaration – that: “... different destinations and stakeholders will have different priorities...” Each is unique,⁸ and environmental impacts need to be prioritised and managed locally, including solid and liquid waste and the consequences of irresponsible disposal, such as seepage, downstream and sea pollution. Only greenhouse gas emissions have non-local impacts, although the cumulative loss of habitats and species may result in global extinctions. The growth of plastic waste and traditional disposal in water courses, as well as dumping from ships, has resulted in large islands of plastic trash in the oceans.⁹ Plastics are now widely found in our seas and oceans. Their spread pays no respect to local or national boundaries; both plastic waste and greenhouse gas emissions are classic examples of the tragedy of the commons.

The tourism sector of the world economy is large – it consumes resources and has negative impacts, both in transporting tourists from the originating markets, and in the destinations. The World Travel and Tourism Council claims that the travel and tourism economy represented 9.8% of global GDP in 2015, and reports that for the fifth successive year the travel and tourism sector grew at 2.8%, outpacing the global economy which grew at 2.3%. Looking forward, WTTC forecasts 4.2% annual growth for 2016-2026.¹⁰ The UNWTO’s Davos Declaration, agreed in 2007, accepted that tourism accounted for about 5% of global CO₂ emissions, and also accepted the responsibility to address a quadruple bottom line – adding climate responsiveness to the canonical three.¹¹ If you are tempted to argue that 9.2% of global GDP creates only 5% of emissions and that the industry is therefore carbon efficient, don’t. The figures are not easily comparable in this way; they rather suggest that the total emissions generated by travel and tourism are greater than 5% if similar methodologies were used to calculate emissions. The economic impact is estimated including all expenditure; greenhouse gas emissions are estimated using a much narrower definition.

The World Travel and Tourism Council, with the UNWTO, have through satellite accounting established that the travel and tourism sector is large. Their

8 Cape Town Conference (2002): 2 and Sharpley (2009a): 179

9 Sheavly and Register (2007), Moore (2008), Ocean Conservancy (2014)

10 WTTC (2016): 5, the estimates include suppliers to the sector.

11 UNWTO Davos Declaration, 3 October (2007): 1