

Taking Responsibility for Tourism

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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. Rio was about environment and development; 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.²

Krippendorff's first book, *Die Landschaft Fresser (The Landscape Devourers)* 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, 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

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

2 Cape Town Conference (2002): 4

different priorities...’ Each is unique,³ 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 cumulative loss of habitats and species may result in global extinctions.

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 asking what responsible aviation might look like.

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 represents 9.2% of global GDP, and forecasts that it will grow at an average annual rate of 4.4% over the next decade.⁴ 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.⁵ 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 comparable easily in this way.

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

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

4 WTTC (2010): 5, the estimates include suppliers to the sector.

5 UNWTO Davos Declaration, 3 October 2007: 1

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