3 Responsible Tourism in Destinations

Take responsibility for achieving sustainable tourism, and to create better places for people to live in and for people to visit.

Cape Town Declaration

To experience a different place, to see other peoples' places and how they live there, is a major generator of travel and tourism. The celebration of, and respect for, diversity are fundamental to Responsible Tourism. Article 1 of the UN World Tourism Organization's Global Code of Ethics for Tourism asserts the importance of an "attitude of tolerance and respect for the diversity of religious, philosophical and moral beliefs", as "both the foundation and the consequence of responsible tourism". It calls on stakeholders in tourism, including the tourists, to "observe the social and cultural traditions and practices of all peoples". The world's destinations reflect our planet's ecological and socio-cultural diversity. Responsible Tourism places importance on all three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – and accepts that the priorities will vary from place to place. We take our holidays in other peoples' places, their places; it is for the people who live there to determine their priorities. Unfortunately there is often an imbalance of power, and the interests of the tourists and the businesses which cater to them can distort local priorities in favour of the visitors over the visited, in favour of the travel and tourism sector over other groups.

The case for tourism often, by default, assumes that more is better. For the businesses involved, this may be the case, but for local communities, their environments and our climate it is important that we debate the purpose of tourism. What is it for? Why do we want it? How much of it do we want? Tourism affects local people and their places, through a range of local organisations and government structures. Tourism, unmanaged, can easily create a tragedy of the commons: it is the locals – authorities and government, who make decisions about regulation, public spending, taxes and subsidies – who must manage it, and bear the costs of doing so. They must shape the activity of tourism and its scale. Destinations are not infinite, neither individually

nor collectively. Not everywhere can be a destination, able to attract people to travel – and destinations themselves cannot absorb limitless numbers of tourists.

This chapter looks first at the concept of destination and who shapes it. Then, we ask, what is the purpose of tourism? From a destination perspective, what is it for? We shall then look at national governance in Thailand, England and South Africa, then at local governance and the challenge of disintermediation with examples from Barcelona and Bonito in Brazil, before looking at the role that tourism marketing can play in enabling communities in destinations to use tourism and to address its sustainability and its resilience.

The Responsible Tourism imperative, to "create better places for people to live in and for people to visit", requires that priority is given to local people. Even in those places that exist entirely because of tourism, people are leading their lives, going to school, going to work, growing old. One of the fundamental inequalities of tourism is that between the visited and visitor: those for whom tourism is part of their routine life, at work or in the streets, and those who are on vacation away from their everyday experience, in someone else's place. Krippendorf argued that in "cases of incompatibility or doubt, the interests of host populations must have precedence over those of outsiders".[1] It follows from this principle that it is for local people to determine how they wish to use tourism and how it needs to be managed in order that it is sustainable in their place and for their community. It is for locals to define sustainability for their place, to determine the issues that need to be addressed. This is their responsibility.

Destinations can be contested spaces where the social constructs of visited and visitors collide. Eade describes London's young Bangladeshi community in Brick Lane,[2] the "wider context of the increasing Islamisation of public space in the area" and conflict with a Jewish historian providing Jewish heritage tours of the same space.[3] Tourism is a cultural process, and a destination is a social product: the "visible structure of a place expresses the emotional attachments held by both its residents and its visitors";[4] it also creates and forms those attachments. Tourism plays a prominent role in the social construction of a place, not only because of the activities of those who market them, but also as a consequence of the interactions which take place there, interactions

1   Krippendorf (1987): 118
2   In Spitalfields in the East End of London immediately adjacent to the City of London.
3   Eade (2002): 137–138
4   Ringer (1998): 10

in which tourists and day visitors are not the only actors. As Squire points out, "… destinations are not merely a leitmotif for geographical place. Rather they are also social and cultural constructions whose meanings and values are negotiated and redefined by diverse people, and mediated only tangentially to a particular tourist setting."[5]

People in destinations, local communities, are rarely, if ever, of one opinion about tourists and tourism, or about anything else. Different individuals, businesses and groups want to see different kinds of visitors, or none at all. In any community where tourism occurs there will be direct and indirect beneficiaries, those who are unaffected and those who are disadvantaged. Different kinds of tourism and tourists have different economic, social and environmental impacts, affecting different stakeholders. Those who are content with things as they are may argue for little engagement by national or local government, although they will probably want public money to be used for promoting the sector. Government legislates, regulates and is responsible for land use and development planning: it imposes taxation and it benefits businesses in the tourist sector by providing marketing, a benefit rarely afforded to other sectors. Businesses and the 'industry' tend to want more marketing and less regulation and taxation. It is to local government that people turn to manage the pollution caused by tourists, to remove litter from the streets and commons, to regulate coach parking, or through planning to object to a change of use or the building of a hotel.

Destinations

Destinations attract tourists. Tourists and travellers have a place to go: whether they plan to go on to another or to return, they are travelling with a destination in mind. Generally a destination will have a number of attractions and provide tourism services, accommodation and hospitality. Destination implies a place which attracts non-local visitors, people who have travelled some distance from their homes. How far from home they travel is determined by the strength of the attraction(s) at the destination and the tourist's capacity to journey there – principally defined by their access to the resources necessary for travel: money and leisure time. Destinations will be attractive to different people, a function of motivation, ease of access and cost. Some will be attractive only to domestic tourists; others will have the capacity to attract from particular national and international source markets, and not only the most proximate.

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5   Squire (1998): 82–83