4 Ethics and Values

Introduction

Ethical concerns underpin the sector of sustainable tourism. Ethics asks questions about what is good and right (while morals will tell us what is good and right). Ethics is what allows us to make decisions about daily interactions with others and the world around us – it is fundamental to constructing the types of sustainable relationships that we have already discussed in Chapter 1. At its most basic level ethics asks us to distinguish right from wrong.

The purpose or advantage of having a moral compass is that it points you in a direction, no matter what the circumstances are around you, so that other factors (peer pressure, fatigue, instant gratification, ego inflation) don't influence what decision you take on a moment-to-moment basis. The United Nations has provided us with a set of Universal Values that can serve as a starting point for any discussion of ethics, and these values are peace, freedom, social progress, equal rights, and human dignity. You might consider these sufficient or you might feel (like I do) that they focus too narrowly on the human sphere and add your own values to your moral compass, such as Love, Truth, Right Conduct, Non-Violence, which can extend to the natural world, e.g. through the food choices we make, such as veganism, which are often guided by the value of non-violence.

How closely we hold our moral compass is likely to be a major part of the difference between individuals in tourism (be they tourists or decision-makers) who practice sustainability, and ones who don't (or to a lesser extent) *ceteris paribus* (which means all other factors being equal, and by other factors I mean legislation, system of production and consumption, access to funding, social norms). Indeed, a consideration of ethics is so important in sustainable tourism that an ethics-based platform has been suggested as an extension of the advocacy → cautionary → adaptancy → knowledge-based platforms that we reviewed in Chapter 1. Macbeth (2005) calls for a sixth platform in tourism studies, an ethics platform – he places this even after a fifth sustainability platform. An ethics platform provides us with the moral compass to make decisions about all our travel-related decisions, especially the hard ones that we don't like to think about. One common thread to all studies of ethics in tourism is that, compared

to other sectors, it is under-studied. One lead author in this area has argued that tourism is more often than not viewed as:

> *"a club that bases its ethics on being free to do and say as one pleases […]: I paid for it, so I deserve it"* (Fennell, 2006, p.356).

The implication here is that our values and our moral compass no longer apply when we are on away from home, which becomes a challenge (c.f. Chapter 6) for making tourism more sustainable.

The hedonic nature of tourism means that we do not think about ethics as much as we perhaps should do. Moreover, as we have already discussed in Chapter 2, that relationships in tourism can be tenuous or ephemeral, and therefore appear less important or salient than relationships in our everyday lives. In fact, some researchers have stated that "*the absence of ethical leadership in the tourism industry has been truly 'astounding'*" (Donyadide, 2010, p.429). Indeed, of all the reasons to become more sustainable, ethical and moral arguments are often deliberately excluded as being the least considered factor by most tourism businesses (Hall & Brown, 2006).

On the other hand, Hall and Brown (2006, p.6) outline at least five reasons why tourism would particularly benefit from the application of ethics:

1 It is an activity focussed on human behaviour.

2 It includes several different actors representing a range of perspectives and objectives.

3 It has an applied context.

4 It has social, cultural, economic, ecological and political dimensions.

5 It can create a range of different combinations of impacts in a wide variety of contexts across the globe.

This chapter will introduce some of the basics of ethical thinking and decision-making, how and why these apply to tourism. We'll look at some specific cases where the ethical dimensions of tourism are particularly challenging, why talking about ethics can be uncomfortable and why it is important that we give voice to our values, in a way that acknowledges and diffuses that discomfort.

We look at what extending our ethical framework beyond a human-centred world through a 'deep ecology' lens and the Earth Charter. These ideas have been slowly evolving from the early days of Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), the Club of Rome's 1972 *Limits to Growth* and the 1987 *Brundtland Report: Our Common Future* covered in Chapter 1, and both set the groundwork for some of the management tools presented in Chapter 8, e.g. in the form of Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) strategies or codes of ethics, frameworks such as Rights of Nature, as well as the foundation for the regenerative movement, including regenerative tourism covered in Chapter 11.

Key words and concepts

- Deontology
- Moral relativism
- Utilitarianism
- Ethics of care
- Virtue ethics
- Phronesis
- Moral dilemma

- Preference projection
- False consensus bias
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Certification schemes
- Universal values
- Deep ecology

4.1 Basics of ethics

Many of us are used to operating out of a rational decision-making process – what is sensible, and more often than not, what is sensible according to principles of entrepreneurial self-interest. If you live in the 'Western world', you (meaning I, as I don't know where you, the reader, are situated) live in a world that is dominated by three notions that are so pervasive that we rarely consider them, or find them hard to accommodate as 'just stories' if we do (a bit like asking a fish to describe water – the fish has no point of contrast from which to define what water is or isn't like, and yet all terrestrial and flying creates emerged from water at some point). These are individualism, human exceptionalism, and progress (c.f. Tom Wessels' 2013 book *The Myth of Progress: Towards a Sustainable Future* (see the list of recommended reads at the end of the chapter). These three notions need serious attention if we are to move towards sustainability. To this end, I will let one of the people who inspires me tell you what might replace these notions. You'll see how he discusses care, ethics, co-journeying, all themes which are picked up in this chapter – as well as some process tips ('move at the speed of trust') to enact these, and finally his invitation to live differently.
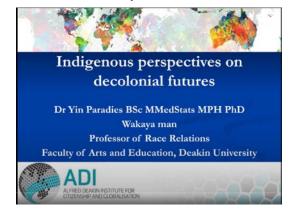

Figure 4.1: Prof Yin Paradies on decolonial thinking, ethics, responsibility, and care. To hear his thoughts, head to: www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrEqMmZpziI&list=PPSV.