



## Responsible Tourism: A New Era of Responsibility?

Joseph M. Cheer<sup>a,b,\*</sup>; Hiram Ting<sup>c,d,e</sup>; Choi-Meng Leong<sup>f</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Center for Tourism Research, Wakayama University, Japan; <sup>b</sup>Monash University, Australia; <sup>c</sup>Sarawak Research Society; <sup>d</sup>Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management, UCSI University, Malaysia; <sup>e</sup>College of Tourism, Hospitality, and Transportation Management, Polytechnic University of the Philippines, Philippines; <sup>f</sup>Faculty of Business and Management, UCSI University, Malaysia

\*Correspondence: [jmcheer@wakayama-u.ac.jp](mailto:jmcheer@wakayama-u.ac.jp)

Received: 15 January 2021; Revised 23 January 2021; Accepted 25 January 2021

**ABSTRACT:** The discourse on responsible tourism, although not new, has been given a new lease on life in the wake of COVID-19. Before 2020, global tourism mobilities were unparalleled with seemingly little standing in the way of the juggernaut that tourism had become. Typically, tourism is seen through an economic lens – for the jobs it provides and the impetus it gives to the coffers of governments and the wallets of tourism dependent communities. This has not changed since the tourism growth model was spawned in the 1960s and has only intensified through to the era of overtourism. In invoking the term, *New Era of Responsibility*, it not too subtly suggests that for global tourism, the reframing that needs to take place is urgent and has been expedited by the pandemic of 2020. What is called for has been broached before and if tourism is to be the panacea of the catalogue of things ascribed to it, business as usual is surely not feasible. The call for an epoch where responsibility is assumed reverberates in talking circles that reference the Anthropocene as a time when the urgency to act with greater responsibility is now, more than ever, vital, given that the demands put upon the planet continue to intensify while the requisite attention needed to allow recovery and replenishment, and to stave off system failure, continually deteriorates. Tourism has become entrenched as a lifestyle phenomenon for many, and a livelihood source for as many more. The call for responsible tourism appeals to finding the balance between competing priorities and most importantly, to acknowledge planetary limitations.

**KEYWORDS:** responsible tourism; sustainable tourism; overtourism; tourism degrowth

### A New Era of Responsibility

In 2009, among the many goals raised in the inauguration speech of the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, Barack Obama, was his calls for a *New Era of Responsibility* - while explicitly referring to domestic American concerns, this acknowledgement stood out for its significance and timeliness for the entire global community. In not too subtle terms, the call was seemingly for urgent change and a rethink concerning how humans inhabit the planet and how we relate to and care for each other. Equally important, was his exhortations about the interconnectivity among us and that what transpires in his country, usually has massive ripple effects throughout the globe – when the US sneezes, everyone else catches a cold so to speak. Political rhetoric aside, while this was by no means the first high level appeal for greater responsibility, it signals

what Donna Haraway refers to as the “inflection point of consequence that changes the name of the “game” of life on earth for everybody and everything”. While ascribed inflections points might be arbitrary in their conception, Haraway’s calls align with the turn to the so-called *New Era of Responsibility* (Corrick, 1990, p. 6):

“The catalyst for this change is the awareness of our responsibilities, which engenders a holistic view of the very basis of our existence – an integrated existence embracing our social, technological and physical environments.”

The call for an epoch where responsibility is assumed reverberates in talking circles that reference the Anthropocene as a time when the urgency to act with greater responsibility is now, more than ever, vital, given that the demands put upon the planet continue to intensify while the requisite attention needed to allow recovery and replenishment, and to stave off system failure, continually deteriorates. As Bruno Latour (2014, p. 4) suggests, if we don’t acknowledge our Anthropocene predicament, “there is no prayer, and no chance of escaping to anywhere else” should catastrophic system failure come to pass. In the same vein, Rasmussen Karlsson (2015, p. 26) reinforces Latour’s caution and in employing the ecological footprint metaphor, argues:

Scratching beneath the glossy surface of the now almost universal practice of greenwashing, what this essentially means is a radical consumption critique and a rejection of global capitalism in toto.

The greenwashing referred to by Karlsson confronts the way procrastination and obfuscation, particularly in policy and industry circles has become all too common in the interests of ‘business as usual’ and, where rather than addressing social and ecological urgencies (that is, acting responsibly), the drive for growth, increased profitability and productivity increases take precedence. Much of what is alluded to in the shaping of the *New Era of Responsibility* references what Giorgos Kallis and Sam Bliss (2019, p. 479) frame as post environmentalism: “Precisely when nothing seems to limit us – as seemingly nothing does in the Anthropocene, with humans leaving little unaltered – it is essential to define our limits”. Kallis and Bliss’ call is for degrowth where ostensibly, responsible consumerism acknowledges that general global levels of consumption must face a time of reckoning - for to not address this, is irresponsible and unyielding to intensifying extraction of the planet’s natural resources. This also harkens back to Donna Haraway’s (2015, p. 161) pleas that “We, human people everywhere, must address intense, systemic urgencies”. Apropos, this echoes Barry Corrick’s (1990, p. 60) entreaty from some three decades earlier:

We really have no choice other than to develop a perspective of total environment (social, physical and technological) as the basis of our transition into an Era of Responsibility. It is the basis not only for the survival of our planet but for a new, sustainable relationship with our universe.

2020 was without doubt an *annus horribilis*, and as a new decade is ushered in, the shadow of COVID-19 looms large over the planet, stoking unprecedented disruptions and enforcing discombobulating ruptures to the regular rhythms in the everyday. To employ Donna Haraway’s ‘inflection point’ phraseology – that the planet has never before faced a pandemic of these proportions, insofar as its reach and spread is abundantly clear. Much cogitation and hand wringing has gone into questions concerning coming to grips with the pandemic and how any such recovery is likely to take place. For the most part, its been a case of one step forward

and two back, as subsequent waves of coronavirus have emerged, setting recovery back on its heels. The rapid development of vaccines and its deployment has already begun, especially in countries of the global North where frontline emergency workers, government officers and policymakers have become the first to be vaccinated. Whether any or all of the developed vaccines is the antidote to enforced global immobility or not, remains in question (Cheer, Hall & Saarinen, 2020).

All of this ratchets up the urgency to reinforce the calls for a *New Era of Responsibility*, cognizant not only of planetary and ecological limits, but also of wider social justice concerns, and of the need to reform social, economic and political systems that hinder equity, fairness and responsibility. The responsibility at large referred to is the sweet spot between extracting from the planet, and making way for a new consciousness that genuinely reconciles with the impulses for economic development and prosperity gains. This alludes to Esther Reed's (2018, p. 12) retort that "Today's global realities demand instead a recasting of responsibility as links between observable facts and what realists call the 'open-systemic world'". Furthermore, when it comes to global tourism mobilities, Reed's sentiments resonate – how can the sector be refashioned away from its current manifestations, widely argued to be problematic and in light of the pandemic of 2020, demonstrates its fragility and proneness to shocks and disturbances that have left tourism dependent communities in disarray? Accordingly, responsible consumption and production of tourism takes on greater urgency in what are classic Anthropocene moments (Mostafanezhad & Norum, 2020).

### **Journaling Responsible Tourism**

The underlying aim of this editorial to the inaugural issue of *Journal of Responsible Tourism Management* is not to extend a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the entire gamut of the critical political ecology discourse that is fundamental to responsible consumption and production, or to offer an entire treatise on the genesis and status quo of responsible tourism - that is beyond and outside the scope of what usually comprises an editorial – rather, the aim is to appraise some of the key antecedents that have helped develop scholarly discussions around responsible tourism and the assemblages aligned with it. Additionally, a secondary aim is to hint at a way forward for research into responsible tourism, and in particular to consider the ramifications of how COVID-19, arguably the single biggest disruptor to international tourism is likely to shape and influence invocations of responsible tourism henceforth (Lew et al., 2020). In doing so, we construct a scaffold for the collection of papers that make up this very first issue of the *Journal of Responsible Tourism*.

As a broad framing, responsible tourism as an umbrella term or nomenclature, is tied to responsible and mindful consumption and production of travel, and linked to wider consumption and production concerns (Fennell, 2008; Goodwin & Francis, 2003). Unsurprisingly, as the global tourism industry faces the pandemic head on, the resulting economic recession has exposed the brittleness of tourism dependence on individual and family livelihoods, as well as to national and local economies (Lew et al, 2020). Rather akin to the melting of Antarctica's ice sheets, the drop-off in tourism reveals rugged remnants of an underlying context that has hitherto been out of sight, signaling the urgency for adaptive approaches toward recovery and resilience building, or run the risk of continued and permanent decline (Cheer & Lew, 2017; Lew & Cheer, 2017).

This is also a reminder of Harng Luh Sin's (2010) line of questioning when it comes to responsible tourism – who are we responsible to and what are we responsible for? Sin (p. 984) aligns responsibility with care, *vis a vis* volunteer tourism and highlights how “many academics have turned to classical ethical theory and analyzed the ethics foregrounding what should be deemed as responsibilities of various parties involved in tourism development”. Indeed, responsibility, infers care and attention to disjuncture that detracts from better tourism outcomes (Cheer, 2018; Mostafanezhad, Cheer & Sin, 2020).

For the global tourism industry, the pandemic of 2020 has been debilitating, nobbling any chance of international travel in the short run, and bringing an end to what had been an extended period of international tourism growth, culminating in international arrivals of around 1.4 billion at the end of 2019, and with greater numbers of domestic trips usually glossed over (Cheer, Hall & Saarinen, 2020). In Australia, for example, the country's government has suggested that borders may be closed for the entirety of 2021 for non essential travel – tourists, more or less. Other forecasts are for global tourism to not return to normalcy until 2023 and beyond.

Tourism dependent economies had become accustomed to what were continuing upward trajectories, and with that came widespread development and a reorientation to the promises of the wider visitor economy. For travelers, opportunities to travel abroad had become unparalleled, aided by low cost carriers that helped underline the democratization of travel. Further, advances in travel technology have made traveling less onerous and more seamless with applications that have aided the traveller in way finding, sourcing of accommodation and transport and, the sharing of travel stories and photography. Travel mobilities that have relied so much on unrestricted aviation and mostly open borders have come to realise that these things, usually taken for granted, can rapidly come unstuck. Indeed, prognostications about what could curtail the international tourism growth trajectory included events such as a global financial crunch, oil crisis or widespread global conflict (Milano, Cheer & Novelli, 2019). A pandemic of gargantuan proportions was not even considered by most, if not all tourism industry stakeholders.



**Figure 1: Anti Tourism Campaign in Barcelona**  
Source: Claudio Milano, 2017.

However, even before the pandemic's emergence, the chorus calling for a rethink of the global tourism sector had become louder (Figure 1) (Fletcher et al., 2020). The protests against the effects of overtourism are a case in point where residents of popular tourist cities had decided that the so-called limits to acceptable change had been exceeded, and that their ways of life and well being had undergone disruptive and irreversible transformations (Figure 2) (Dodds & Butler, 2019; Milano, Cheer & Novelli, 2019a; 2019b). Tourism, in these instances, had come to have a disproportionate influence on the day to day, and the needs of tourists had come to be prioritized above that of residents. Originating in Sweden, the term *flygskam* or flight shame emerged as reaction against this, as well as the gargantuan carbon footprint of international aviation (Mkono, 2019). Cruising, the fastest growing sector of international tourism also came under attack for its questionable practices and most prominently, its environmental impacts (Cheer, 2020).



**Figure 2: Campaign against touristification of neighborhoods**  
Source: Claudio Milano, 2017.

### Antecedents of Responsible Tourism

One of the earliest scholars to have taken a critical and expansive eye on responsible tourism, Brian Wheeler opined: “Responsible tourism has grown as a reaction to mass tourism, is being caught up in the groundswell of green issues and championed as a suitable way forward” (Wheeler, 1991, p. 92). Wheeler (1990) cites a World Tourism organization conference in 1989 that set in train more widespread discussion of responsible tourism as distinct from alternative tourism, the standard bearing nomenclature at the time for discourses regarding the excesses of mass tourism as seen especially in now renowned historical exemplars such as Benidorm, Bali and the Balearics. In particular, attempts were made to articulate the exact definitional parameters of responsible tourism which was defined accordingly (Wheeler, 1990, p. 262):

We define Responsible Tourism as relating to all forms of tourism with respect to the hosts natural, built, and cultural environments and the interests of all of the parties concerned, i.e. hosts, guests/visitors, tourist industry, governments et al.

The urgency to plan and manage the prevailing forces of mass tourism goes back a decade or so earlier as seen in seminal works by Louis Turner and John Ash (1976) in *The Golden Hordes: International Tourism and the Pleasure Periphery*, and Valene Smith's (1989) *Host and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*. In a sense, Turner and Ash, and Smith were the early pathfinders for critically assessing the upshot of rapid tourism growth, that at the time, was largely couched in terms of the unparalleled economic benefits that the sector bequeathed to destination communities (Diamond, 1977; Ghali, 1976). The World Bank was a key instigator of tourism development in undeveloped contexts (as distinct from less developed or developing country contexts) with H. David. Davis (1967, p. 1), a then key figure in the organisation boasting that "the international tourist trade generates foreign exchange earnings and stimulates employment and incomes".

Moheb A. Ghali who was based in Hawai'i in the 1970's had a bird's eye view of tourism's power to drive economic development, and posed the question: "How much did tourism contribute?" and "Was it worth it?" (1976, p. 538). This question came at a time in Hawai'i when the bona fides of tourism were beginning to be questioned as rapid development transformed the island of Oahu in particular, and as the demands of tourism on Indigenous Hawai'ians saw increasing tensions raised. Ghali's analysis demonstrated that while income growth was considerable from the mid 1950's through to the 1970's, the absence of tourism growth was projected to have likely had a lesser impact, albeit not significant. This analysis conducted explicitly in income terms, did not take into account the opportunity costs of a tourism led strategy that has today made the islands heavily dependent on tourism as an economic driver. Needless to say, considerations of responsible tourism during this era were doubtless absent with boosterism through tourism a dominant thrust of economic policy development.

In further progressing this discussion in chronological order to chart antecedents, in 1964, Forster (p. 217) argued that "Despite its economic importance tourism has been neglected as an area of investigation by social scientists and has remained a matter for practical manipulation by Tourist bureaux, government departments, and airline advertising". Although not explicitly saying as much, Forster flagged early concerns about the transformative nature of tourism and the need for caution, forewarning that "tourism will be disruptive depending upon its relative importance to the sectors of the economy and the extent to which it fits the established local condition" (p. 219). In a sense, this was an early sounding that alludes to the need for policy makers to be wary of the need for responsible tourism expansion. Forster (p. 221) was also prescient in highlighting the dual edged characteristic of tourism:

It is obvious that tourists bring money for this is the reason they are tolerated and sometimes actively courted. Not only do they increase the amount of money in circulation but money reaches further both in the sense of touching more people more often and in giving a monetary valuation to more aspects of behaviour. Tourism thus causes a change in both the standard of living and the style of life of a community.

Forster's voice was an exception to the vast majority who were still preoccupied with the diverse potential for tourism, giving short shrift to any chance that there may be inadvertent and adverse impacts. Some, like geographer Walter Christaller (1964) before him, expounded on how tourism had the potential to develop underdeveloped peripheral areas, and on the development patterns that take place. For Christaller, the recreation and leisure possibilities of the periphery were prominent concerns and that the touristic potential represented untapped potential. Notwithstanding, others like Theron Nunez represented a quizzical and dissenting

voice at the time that questioned whether the wider consequences of tourism were being taken into account by policy makers. Nunez's (1963, p. 349) gaze was on the rapidly forming Mexican tourism economy, and his striking riposte meditated on the destabilising and transformative impacts of the host-guest encounter:

The new image of urban Mexican life presented to the people of Cajititlan is one of wealth and presumably limitless leisure, characteristics with which they, as peasant Mexicans, cannot identify.

As an anthropologist, Nunez knew explicitly that “change involves conflict” and concentrates power in the capital class – “the control of political power by one or the other barrios has become a matter of utmost concern (1963, p. 351). Acculturation of tourism communities was Nunez's preeminent focus and his discourse called for caution and circumspection regarding the ebullience over rapid tourism development – “that tourism may bring about rapid and dramatic changes in the loci of authority, land-use patterns, value systems, and portions of an economy” (Ibid.). In effect, Nunez was foreshadowing what we now know is implicit in the responsible and wider sustainable tourism discourse – that the well-being of tourism host communities is given equal priority with the economic imperatives that so often frame expansion of the sector (Cheer, 2020).

In the 1950s as the post-World War II recovery took on greater momentum, travel in and around the European continent was given massive impetus, so much so that in the Mediterranean, increased visitation lubricated the economic wheels that had become disrupted in the wake of the global conflict. In assessing the medium run impacts of tourism in Italy, Lefebvre D'Ovidio highlighted how tourist visitation had increased by 114% between 1937 and 1955 and questioned whether the country had adapted to the sector's growth sufficiently well enough. The question of quality of tourists was also raised, with D'Ovidio arguing that optimising the sector was critical because of the growing volume of excursionists who were coming across the border but seemingly spending little. D'Ovidio highlights the perennial issue of the quality of tourism growth and whether less is more – as seen in contemporary argumentation about destinations leveraging high yield visitors rather than chasing visitation growth. D'Ovidio (1956, p. 133) also underlined the unintended consequences of too much tourism:

The high degree to which the traffic is thus seasonal in Italy is unfortunate because it subjects the country's tourist organisation to special strain, and because it reduces the extent to which use is made of the capacity to handle tourist traffic.

That tourism might simply be a benign influence on touristed areas was understandably *de rigueur* much earlier – as evidenced in the 1950s. Clifford Zierer (1952, p. 462) reflected this: “A notable characteristic of the tourist and recreation industry is that it does not-or should not-lead to the destruction of natural resources, but instead encourages their conservation and enjoyment”. Zierer's lens was trained on a period where the automobile underpinned domestic travel in the US and much about tourism was wide-eyed and adventurous, as one would expect of a travelogue. Zierer (p. 480) also observed some of the adverse implications of tourism:

“Unfortunately for the tourist interested in seeing new places and fine scenery, highways all too frequently are bordered by advertising billboards, roadsides littered with discarded bottles and cans, and approaches to towns and cities blemished by ugly roadside structures and storage yards.”

The ebullience for tourism in the 1950s was evident across a post-war Europe where in Italy for example, in international tourist numbers rapidly increased from 5 million in 1951 to nearly 11 million in 1955 (O'Vidio, 1956). This incited little consternation and with the attraction of foreign exchange earnings, tourism was predictably lauded at a time when the country sorely needed to address a worsening trade deficit. As H. David Davis (1961) also outlines, the economic imperative was also very much central to tourism development plans across the Mediterranean, Balkans and North Africa – zones where tourism now features very prominently. Understandably, economic expansion was seen as the holy grail with little thought given to anything other than concerns regarding investment and earning of foreign currency.

When it comes to tourism's historical trajectory, while the 1950's and 1960's were epochs punctuated by exclamations of the growth potential of tourism, little consideration was given to the need for responsible or sustainable growth. After all, this was the era preceding the economic dystopia wrought as a result World War II, and at a time where recovery and rebuilding were central concerns. The enormous prosperity gains that followed, especially in Europe and North America, and developments of the jet engine, gave ideal impetus to the acceleration of holiday and leisure travel abroad. Consequently, while the preoccupation after World War II was restoration of the global economy, growing affluence and improved international mobilities (land, sea and air) followed, especially from the 1960s onwards. What followed in the 1970's, set the scene for the modern day tourism industry.

## Rhetoric

Before the disruptions of COVID-19 in 2020, when it came to critical discourses on global tourism, much of this was framed by the unprecedented and rapid growth of tourism as tourist border crossings continued to climb to thresholds beyond even the most optimistic of forecasts. 1.5 billion international trips by the end of 2019 was unparalleled with forecasts of 1.8 billion by 2030 (UNWTO). While much of this growth in international travel was fueled by a growing Chinese middle class with a penchant for overseas sojourns, the prominent role of low cost carriers across the global tourism turbo charged visitation to many popular destinations. Furthermore, this was aided by the emergence of sharing platforms such as Airbnb, where the catch cry 'living like a local' morphed from being a slogan for the company, into tourists wanting genuine, bespoke experiences away from a mass produced itinerary.

Consequently, a perfect storm was whipped up taking tourists outside of what were hitherto 'locals only' zones, making the contest for space and place ever more intense (Milano, Novelli & Cheer, 2019b). The term overtourism was spawned to describe the extent to which locals suffered the consequences of tourism growth that precipitated permanent and marginalizing transformations to their well-being and backyards. The popular European destination cities such as Venice, Barcelona and Amsterdam, among others, were exemplars for the heightened tensions and frictions that emerged where residents shouldered a disproportionate load of the costs of tourism growth, while at the same time, sharing in an uneven and lesser portion of the spoils.

Concerns over the growing carbon footprint of international aviation tied to tourism growth had also become a festering wound for activists decrying tourism growth, no doubt stoking the emergence of *flygskam* or flight shame narratives. Flight shaming is, more or less, a cry for a social and consumer led movement that demurs against precipitating modes of travel that contribute little to mitigating the contribution of international tourism and toward taking action



on climate change. The tourism industry acknowledges shifting consumer sentiments but for the most part, lags with the exception of a handful. For example, *Intrepid Travel*, the globe's largest small group and adventure travel company champions its responsible tourism credentials as seen through its adoption of the B Corp model:

B Corps are a new kind of business that creates benefit for all stakeholders, not just shareholders. They are businesses that meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose. (see <https://www.intrepidtravel.com/en/b-corp>)

Another prominent industry actor, the aptly named *Responsible Travel*, a tour operator and activist highlights its remit in line with the wider responsible tourism agenda:

We are not fans of making profit our overriding objective. If we were, then we'd risk exploiting the environment, local residents, our customers and staff. (see <https://www.responsibletravel.com/copy/who-are-we>)

In much the same way, another key industry actor, *G-Adventures* mantra articulates beneficial and enduring impacts on the communities they visit as part of their engagement charter:

The communities we impact ripples far beyond our destinations. (see <https://www.gadventures.com/about-us/core-values/>)

Above and beyond broad notions of responsible and sustainable tourism and the attainment of better outcomes for tourism stakeholders, the genesis of the responsible tourism movement lies in its formal conceptualisation at the *2002 International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations* held in Cape Town. Better known as *The Cape Town Declaration* (International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations, 2002, p. 3), an ambitious agenda was mapped out characterizing the functions and ideals of responsible tourism:

- Minimises negative economic, environmental, and social impacts;
- Generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities, improves working conditions and access to the industry;
- Involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances;
- Makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, to the maintenance of the world's diversity;
- Provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues;
- Provides access for physically challenged people;
- Culturally sensitive, engenders respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence

*The Cape Town Declaration* makes direct acknowledgement of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) *Global Code of Ethics* appeals to “making all forms of tourism sustainable through all stakeholders taking responsibility for creating better forms of tourism and realising these aspirations” (International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations, 2002, p. 2). In amongst the lofty ambitions laid out, guiding principles for economic, social and environmental responsibility were distinguished, highlighting what are the three defining pillars of responsible tourism. Doubtless, *The Cape Town Declaration* was

an inflection point where, for the first time, a formally constructed manifesto for responsible tourism was drawn up, promoting greater awareness that tourism was not a benign force and unless designed with responsible tourism principles in mind, its transformative potential would be forfeited (Ting et al., 2020).

In leveraging *The Cape Town Declaration* and its resulting assemblages, tourism industry practitioner Jeremy Smith (2018, p. 11) argues for a long overdue transformation of tourism, underpinned by very straightforward and pragmatic rationale:

Just as many people think taking a responsible holiday sounds less fun, so many companies see creating a sustainable or responsible product or experiences as being about doing it while causing less harm. Reduce your emissions. Use fewer resources. Create less waste.

Smith's (2018, p. 96) manifesto puts forward a circular approach to tourism transformation, calling for tourism to be "a regenerative, transformative force rather than simply incrementally less negative". Indeed, the many exigencies that tourism is charged with the capacity to address includes - helping mitigate climate change, supporting decarbonisation, providing greater access for all, making pro-poor and development outcomes in the global South, and being a vehicle for global peace and understanding between peoples, among others. All of these accumulations are inextricably tied to responsible tourism and continuously push the line that not only is tourism a business and economic sector, it should also assume a far wider remit. This prompts the question of whether in giving tourism a wide spectrum of responsibility, or see it as a panacea for some of the world's worst ills (Hollenhorst, Houge-Mackenzie & Ostegren, 2014), is this being realistic and achievable. Hollenhorst et al. (p. 306) point to the contradictions inherent in the attempt to promote and strive for sustainable and responsible tourism.

Tourism hides its unsustainability behind a mask that is all the more beguiling because it appears so sustainable. We too easily imagine that tourism as the embodiment of sustainability, when in reality it may represent unrealized hopes and desires for the world we want to live in, the environments we want to inhabit, and economy we want to participate in. We therefore presume that tourism can be a solution, without facing the fact that tourism itself is a substantial part of the problem.

Travel journalist Holly Ashby (2018) also traverses a similar line of questioning - are we starting to expect too much from our travel experiences? As Ashby argues, not only are we looking to transform ourselves and the hosts who cater for our travel needs, we are also looking to transform what is a disparate and multi-faceted industry that is very much profit driven. It is also a reminder of Jonathan Batkin's (1999) retort that the impacts of tourism might have a tendency to be overrated. The bifurcation of tourism as panacea or as a mechanism that blows open a Pandora's Box has become all too common in critical analyses of tourism (Marcoullier, 2007), particularly where it is favoured by the political and business owning classes for its economic potential, boosterism in other words, while those who bear the costs of expansion but not share in its dividends, inevitably push back. Apropos, Marcoullier (p. 29) highlights how such intrinsic contestations and inconsistencies, underline the imperative for larger shifts to responsible tourism:

“Boosterism” as the primary focus of state tourism policy has, at its core, the untested and preconceived conclusion that the attraction of tourists has developmental benefits that exceed costs.”

## Reality

In the 2000s the ascendancy of tourism really took shape, fueled by an unprecedented era of enduring global economic growth, a paucity of widespread global conflict, greater and more affordable access to air travel via low cost airlines, and the development of mobile technologies that have helped position travel via social media as a status and brag worthy affair - all of this has helped propel travel to become a key feature of modern lifestyles. With that came the intensification of tourist hordes in popular destinations across the globe, as well as massive global transfers of capital to places of touristic activity for the construction of supply-side infrastructure. But as Marcoullier alludes, pricing in the real costs of tourism, especially to host communities is rarely considered and probably more difficult to countenance – granted it would be a complex and potentially imprecise endeavour, especially where it concerns measuring non-economic impacts unlike, for example, coming to terms with tourist expenditure or related investment and employment where such data is much easier to capture and make sense of.

There is little consideration or thoughtful analysis focused on the net economic, social, and/or environmental impacts brought about by tourism. (Marcoullier, 2007, p. 28)

Thus, at the end of 2019 when international tourism arrivals were racing ahead of forecast, the sector seemed almost unstoppable with the conveyor belt of tourism production humming along, with little to apprehend its charge ahead. The UNWTO, so often the cheerleader of tourism growth, basked in this context, reinforcing the vitality that tourism generally brings to so many countries, and most particularly in the global South where the tourism as development agenda has long reigned (Cheer, 2020). Yet for all of the accolades bestowed upon it, COVID-19 has exposed the fragility and brittleness of the variegations in tourism dependency, most pronounced in many of the world’s tourism hotspots from Bali to Barbados, Venice to Vientiane and Rome to Rio de Janeiro, among others (Lew et al., 2020). Few, if any scholars and commentators would’ve forecasted a tourism decline of this magnitude seen in 2020.

Before the *annus horribilis* of 2020, the calls were for less and not more tourism. Overtourism emerged as the most common reasons for this where in the Northern hemisphere summer of 2019, international tourism visitation records were smashed. Overtourism became synonymous with host communities buckling under the weight of tourism growth and burdened with the spin-off effects of hyper-inflated housing costs, barriers to accessing public amenities and the general decline in well-being and quality of life (Milano, Cheer & Novelli, 2019; Butler & Dodds, 2019). In some cities, tourism became synonymous with terrorism and tourists were encouraged to go home. Such displays of tourism phobia, while not new, intensified to unparalleled highs with social movements against tourism and tourists becoming ever more amplified (Milano, Novelli & Cheer, 2019a).

Emblematic of the vexed relationship tourism has tended to engender with host communities and the social and ecological backdrop was the context of mountaineering tourism in and around Mount Everest. In 2019, images of human traffic jams on the way up the ascent to Mount Everest went viral exemplifying the extent to which growth had not only blinkered tourists and travelers in the hedonistic pursuit of experience collecting, it also showcased how

the lure of tourism generated lucre obfuscates longer term sustainability and responsible tourism considerations. Similar sentiments played out in the so-called Isle of the Gods, Bali where increased tourism became more or less synonymous with heightened displacement and disadvantage of Balinese who had largely become mere conveyancers for tourism, pushed to the margins while their social and ecological inheritances became ever more compromised (Cole, 2014; Dolezal & Novelli, 2020).

Thus, overtourism not only became one of the most overused buzzwords in scholarly and mainstream discourses, but also served to prick the consciousness of many, who hitherto, were mostly blind to this enduring manifestation. While much of the hype and innuendo around overtourism was driven by overblown media narratives, the lived reality for many host communities was undeniable, rearticulating why responsible tourism development was and still remains a critical aspiration if tourism is to achieve its potential to deliver for communities and not only the stakeholders with dominant financial interests (Cheer, Milano & Novelli, 2019).

One of the most prominent responses to decades of unsustainable tourism growth and the precursor to overtourism thinking was the push for tourism degrowth – no doubt inspired by wider degrowth research and rhetoric that calls for a scaling back of consumption and natural resources extraction (Blázquez-Salom et al., 2019; Fletcher et al., 2019). Tourism degrowth, in its simplest manifestation calls for less tourism, and very often couched in terms of slower and longer staying tourism, higher yielding tourists versus higher tourist visitation, locally oriented versus externally driven and managed tourism, and touristic experiences that are less fossil fuel dependent and more environmentally sound as in the criticism of cruise tourism. While theoretically, tourism degrowth seems a logical and necessary extension to the conversation around responsible tourism, such articulations don't unfold in the same way across the globe (Gascón, 2019), especially for example in countries of the global South who want to see more growth as the best means of archiving income and prosperity gains through tourism. This highlights the doubled-edged nature of tourism degrowth advocacy – meritorious and timely in its conceptualisation but tricky in how this applies across the globe. Notwithstanding, the fundamentals of tourism degrowth remain sound but must align with reframing of tourism that acknowledges that harmonization of competing priorities is vital.

Another of the key themes that has emerged in discussions about the future of tourism is the push for greater decarbonisation of the sector – this references the inextricable links between international aviation and tourism growth. This also aligns with the wider calls across the global economy away from dependence on fossil fuels. Yet as Gössling and Scott (2018) argue, without political will and shift in some of the skepticisms regarding climate change, as well as industry initiatives to transform business models, decarbonisation remains consigned to being theoretically sound, but practically too difficult to address. In the same vein, Becken (2018) advocates for the urgency to decarbonise but notes that this will occur only if widespread system changes are realised – also, this can only happen with both industry and policy maker endorsement and action. The deliberations regarding decarbonisation are also mirrored in the the larger global economy where shifts away from fossil fueled dependence are mired in self interest and political inertia.

## Prospects and Conclusion

So what are the prospects for responsible tourism? The establishment of *Journal of Responsible Tourism* is doubtless a response to this overarching question and to assuming a gap in scholarly

discourses, and toward making a contribution to helping shape policy and tourism industry thinking. More recently, Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020) ebulliently declared that tourism can lead the world to recovery. While such exaggerated rhetoric should be expected from the head of an organisation like the UNWTO, history will continue to be the best judge as to whether this transpires or not, particularly given the checkered nature of such exhortations. This is made all the more difficult given that tourism predominates as part of wider global systems and not in a vacuum all of its own making. It seems obvious then, that if and when a COVID-19 recovery is established, wider changes in policy, transformation of entrenched tourism industry business models, and modification of tourist behaviour must take place in tandem (Ting et al., 2020).

The development of the responsible tourism discourse is rooted very much in conceptualizations of its potential to contribute to responsible consumption of travel and the wider sustainable tourism narrative arch. This necessarily reprises Harng Luh Sin's (2010) line of questioning – to whom and to what are we responsible for? It also harkens back to Esther Reed's (2018) broader framing of the same question: How can we ask the question of responsibility in a globalizing era? Moreover, it is also a reminder of Donna Haraway's appeal that "We, human people everywhere, must address intense, systemic urgencies" (2015, p. 161). For tourism watchers and stakeholders with a vested interest, responsible tourism practices, if adopted, can lead us toward achieving the aspirations of responsible and sustainable tourism, of regenerative tourism and of resilience building for host communities cross the globe. Moving beyond buzzwords and motherhood statements, and the greenwashing or whitewashing that has become synonymous with more social and ecologically minded forms of tourism, is rather what the genesis of responsible tourism calls for as demonstrated in *The Cape Town Declaration*.

If responsible tourism is to be realised beyond its utility as an aspirational goal, systemic change that Susanne Becken (2019) calls for in policy making and practice is imperative. In the end though, returning to Heather Reed's (2018, p. 12) dialogue on the limits of responsibility paves the way for understanding and integrating broader notions of responsibility in theory and practice.

The concept of responsibility in the face of climate change remains meaningful to people with any degree of control over how many flights they take in a year, how often they use the tumble dryer, whether they don an extra pullover or turn up the thermostat and so on, but it is impossible to trace the lines of responsibility between immediate actions and their consequences. In the face of wicked problems, linear conceptions of responsibility as accountability are no longer adequate. But questions of responsibility as attribution also begin to slip and slide.

As the final word, whether responsible tourism simply sustains itself on the back of the necessary notions it connotes, or whether it is able to translate into enduring and impactful policy prescriptions, as well as influence widespread tourism industry operations beyond its marketing utility, remains to be seen. And for scholars, the critical question must be posed – where do they join the fray and to what extent will scholarly cogitations in an outlet like *Journal of Responsible Tourism Management* contribute to more fruitful outcomes for tourism stakeholders and their communities? The answers to all of these questions surely remains at large.

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