



Responsibility, Responsible Tourism, and Our Response

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ABSTRACT: Following the COVID-19 crisis, responsibility in the relaunching and development of tourism is crucial to recovery. This editorial reviews the concept of responsibility and its role in tourism. Evidence from research and practice suggests that responsible tourism, which is a broad concept encompassing individual behaviours and organizational roles that promote sustainability, is increasingly critical and even urgent in the (post-) pandemic era. The tourism sector's responses to the current pandemic are evident in the higher priority assigned to responsible tourism at the individual, destination, and policy levels. It is imperative that scholars now recognise and leverage the need for responsible tourism, not only in research but also in education and training that shapes future responsible tourism practitioners.

KEYWORDS: responsibility; responsible tourism; sustainable tourism; pandemic

The Concept of Responsibility

The current fast-developing and dynamic world we live in has evidently and inevitably taken a toll on environmental and societal well-being. Issues such as pollution, climate change, resource depletion, environmental degradation, child labour, and underpaid workers perennially plague countries worldwide. When discussing these issues, expressions of environmental sentiment and calls for better ecological behaviour often attach the term 'responsibility' (Kaiser & Shimoda, 1999; Kaiser et al., 1999), making it an integral component in the dialogue on sustainability.

Looking back to the 18th and 19th centuries, responsibility revolved around politics and the actions of government representatives. In the 20th century, however, the emphasis shifted to free will and determinism (Williams, 2006). As it is used today, responsibility is an interestingly ambiguous and multi-layered term. In general, when someone is responsible for an event, he or she can be said to be the author of that event (Giddens, 1999), thus relating responsibility to causality or agency. Responsibility is also largely described as a duty or obligation for which a person is held accountable. In the context of consumer behaviour, people's sense of responsibility is believed to greatly affect consumption and behavioural

outcomes (Evans et al., 2017; Wells et al., 2011). Therefore, the general consensus at present is that responsibility significantly influences the way individuals behave and make decisions.

The New World Encyclopedia (2021) states that responsibility is accompanied by three essential elements: (1) norms that determine accountability, (2) freedom or free will to act as a rational agent, and (3) results that can be either praiseworthy or blameworthy. Responsibility can also be viewed as formal or informal; legal judgement being the formal way of evaluating individual or group responsibility (or lack thereof) and moral judgement being the informal way (Williams, 2006). Individual responsibility, in turn, can be extended to collective responsibility, which involves combined group actions to fulfill a collective purpose.

As early as McKeon's (1957) work, responsibility has been said to consist of three dimensions: external, internal, and comprehensive. The external dimension is related to legal and political aspects, wherein penalties are imposed on individuals by the authorities. Conversely, the internal dimension reflects moral and ethical codes that encourage people to consider the consequences of their actions. The comprehensive dimension, also called the reciprocal dimension, is based on social and cultural values that dictate individual autonomy and a civilisation's structure. More recently, Vincent (2011) conceptualised responsibility into the following six aspects: 1) virtue responsibility, i.e., when people take responsibility seriously and do the right things; 2) role responsibility, i.e., when an individual is obligated to perform duties for an organisation or party; 3) outcome responsibility, i.e., when agents are responsible for the outcomes of their actions; 4) causal responsibility, i.e., when actions are the causes or conditions of different outcomes; 5) capacity responsibility, i.e., when cognitive and volitional capacities tell us what we are (or are not) supposed to do to consider, determine, and control our actions; and 6) liability responsibility, i.e., when a person is accountable for what has happened.

What interests us is that across its classifications and dimensions, responsibility promotes sustainability from different perspectives (e.g., ecological, economic, and social-cultural sustainability). Within tourism, the discourse on responsibility places greatest emphasis on the triggers driving sustainable development concepts to be implemented in practice (Cheer et al., 2021; Mihalic & Kaspar, 1996). According to Mihalic et al. (2021), there are three implementation triggers in tourism. First is the awareness-agenda-action implementation phase. Essentially, social awareness must be enhanced on issues related to sustainability and sustainable ethics, as well as appropriate and inappropriate tourism behaviours. Next, sustainability is translated into objectives and corresponding strategies, following which the strategies are further detailed into actions. The second trigger is the socio-psychological aspect, which refers to the rights and responsibilities of tourism to take care of resident socio-psychological wellbeing when tourists and tourism development pervade the places they call home. Third, the right to quality visitor experiences is an important trigger profoundly affecting tourism. For example, unsatisfactory tourism experiences have negative impacts on destination attractiveness and economic success. Taking these triggers into account, it is evident that responsibility has a multifaceted and crucial role to play in sustainable tourism management and consumer behaviour (Saarinen, 2018).

A Review of the Responsible Tourism Literature

Similar to the consumer setting, the tourism sector has a deep concern for responsibility, which has attracted the attention of academics, researchers, and industry practitioners. These parties are increasingly recognising the shift away from traditional sun, sand, and sea holidays towards more experiential and responsible trips (Goodwin & Francis, 2003). Krippendorff (1987) was, in fact, among the first to notice that tourist consumption was beginning to lean towards a more environmentally responsible direction. He interpreted responsibility in tourism from individualistic and tourist-centric viewpoints, on the basis that new tourists hold the baton of responsibility. However, this interpretation merely scratches the surface of all that falls under the concept of responsibility in tourism.

As the name implies, responsible tourism is about assuming and taking responsibility for tourism (Morrison, 2022). It is not about paying lip service but involves adjusting one's behaviours and actions to reduce the harm caused by travellers and to accentuate the benefits that can result from tourism. Who needs to be responsible? Everybody directly and indirectly involved with tourism has a potential role to play. This includes tourists themselves, destinations, tourism businesses, destination management organisations (DMOs), governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), media companies, and others. In particular, government agencies, as the main policy-makers for tourism, play a key role in promoting responsible tourism. Third-party groups including the press and media can also advocate responsible tourism and discourage practices that violate its principles (Morrison, 2022).

In this regard, overtourism and the COVID-19 pandemic have been major wake-up calls that convey the urgent need for greater responsibility from all the aforementioned parties to facilitate global recovery and renewal, which is expressed as the 'New Era of Responsibility' (Cheer et al., 2021). Consequently, the term 'responsible tourism', despite having been around for several years, has become far more prominent as a result of the pandemic (Ting et al., 2020). Responsible tourism is comprised of all forms of tourism that respect the host's natural, built, and cultural environments as well as the interests of all parties concerned (Smith, 1992; Stanford, 2000). Responsible tourism also refers to the participation in tourism activities that prioritise ethical and moral responsibility (Blackstock et al., 2008). Another widely applied definition of responsible tourism is "making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit" (Goodwin, 2014). Most recently, in his book *Tourism marketing in the age of the consumer*, Morrison (2022) defined responsible tourism as being about taking responsibility as a consumer or provider of tourism experiences, services, and products. However, it should be noted that there is no standard definition of this term available nor utilised across tourism studies.

Burrai et al. (2019) indicated the presence of a blurred conceptual separation between sustainable and responsible tourism. Although both aim to enhance positive impacts from economic, social, and environmental perspectives, sustainable tourism encompasses the role of stakeholders and authorities in improving the sector as a whole (macro level), while responsible tourism captures the micro-level interactions among destinations and various actors (e.g., visitors, residents, and businesses) (Fram, 2016). Simply put, the process of individualisation signals the difference between sustainability and responsibility (Saarinen, 2018). Responsible tourism is conceptually distinct from sustainable tourism, especially in terms of its practical virtues (Goodwin, 2016). Notably, responsible tourism incorporates the

element of social movement, which is “a purposive effort by groups of people, who share some common principles and approaches, resulting in a shared sense of direction” (Goodwin, 2016, p. 258).

Delving into its philosophical foundations, Žižek (1989) anchored the ideology of responsible tourism in the Lacanian psychoanalytical concepts of fantasy, reality, and enjoyment, wherein actual reality is supported by dreamlike illusions of one’s desired reality (Burrai et al., 2019). This is confirmed by the growth ideology (Daly, 1996), another philosophy that elucidates the shift from sustainable development to sustainable or inclusive growth. This shift can be explained by a neoliberal turn indicating that development discourses and practices are safeguarded and controlled by the market (Mosedale, 2016). Furthermore, a moral shift promotes caring for the needs of those close by and distant strangers, which is linked to the tenet of responsible tourism (Lawson, 2007).

The key mechanism for the delivery of responsible tourism is the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly goals eight, 12, and 14, which are geared towards neoliberalism (Burrai et al., 2019). Based on the SDGs, the implementation of responsible tourism at the individual level can be realised through ethical consumerism, whereas if collective socio-economic and environmental knowledge is required, then sharing at the destination level is more effective (Saarinen, 2021). Consequently, responsible tourism is not limited to the ethics portrayed by tourism actors alone, but also encompasses the socio-economic processes that cover the wider scope of operations related to tourism (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018).

Responsible tourism is closely linked to involved parties’ awareness and concern on various types of responsibility, namely economic, social, cultural, and environmental. Accordingly, several terms are associated with responsibility in tourism, the foremost of which are corporate social responsibility (CSR), destination social responsibility (DSR), and environmentally responsible behaviour (ERB). CSR refers to a guiding business policy for tourism companies to integrate social and environmental concerns in missions, strategies, operations, and even stakeholder interactions (Lund-Durlacher, 2015). DSR represents the responsibility of relevant stakeholders in destinations to generate economic benefits for and protect the well-being of local people, while mitigating the negative economic, environmental, and socio-cultural impacts of tourism (Su et al., 2016). The mechanisms underlying ERB and its importance, in turn, can be understood through various theories, including the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Chen & Tung, 2014), the Value-Belief-Norm Theory (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017), and the Model of Goal-Directed Behaviour (Han et al., 2016).

A broad review of the extant literature on responsible tourism indicates that most studies have been action-based or top-down. The most popular theories used to support this concept include the Stakeholder Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, while the Institutional Theory, Agency Theory, and Actor-Network Theory have made appearances as well. Interestingly, the possibility of integrating sustainable with responsible tourism was articulated in Giddens’s (1984) Structuration Theory, thereby overcoming the issue of dichotomy between institutional structures and moral agency. This theory suggests that the dominance of structure on agents be eliminated, such that individual behaviours and actions are no longer restrained by institutional structures; rather, human activities should play a role in transforming these structures (Saarinen, 2021). Overall, scholarly interest in responsible

tourism appears to show an increasing trend, which is expected to intensify following the pandemic and its eye-opening effects on tourism.

Responsibility during the Pandemic and Our Response

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, travel and tourism have morphed to new levels of consciousness. Greater pragmatism and responsibility is imperative to adapt to this shift; thus, responsible tourism is now more relevant than ever before for both researchers and practitioners (Ting et al., 2020). At the destination level, the promotion of sanitary measures has become critical for the protection of the tourism sector (Tremblay-Huet & Lapointe, 2021). For example, to secure traveler confidence, many destinations are now espousing health and hygiene practices and certifications, such as the Responsible Travel Code and the Responsible Travel Hub in California (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020).

From the perspective of local communities, Sharma et al. (2021) proposed a community-centred tourism framework emphasising responsible approaches to re-set, re-describe, and re-familiarise the tourism sector in the post-pandemic period. At the individual level, mindfulness has turned into a critical asset as the global society calls for responsible behaviour from everyone (Stankov et al., 2020). Indeed, tourists appear to be showing responsible behaviour both via travel choices and on-site actions, although they might not be fully aware of sustainability (Eichelberger et al., 2021). Aware or not, it is evident that people are recognising the need for collective responsibility, and subsequently, are exhibiting a heightened interest in environmentally conscious and responsible travel, thereby drawing greater attention to sustainable tourism and ecotourism (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020).

From a policy perspective, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has proposed procedural responses to COVID-19 to rebuild tourism. Among its key priorities is to promote domestic tourism and build a more resilient and sustainable tourism sector that champions digitalisation, low carbon transition, and structural transformation (OECD, 2020). For example, given the long-distance travel restrictions, an attractive alternative is to explore unfamiliar places close to home via micro-domestic tourism, virtual travel, and psychogeography (Canavan, 2021). Notably, domestic tourism comprises strategies and tactical pathways that, in fact, are geared towards responsible tourism. For instance, the emphasis on domestic tourism boosts crisis recovery and enhances sustainable development in the longer term (Kuščer et al., 2021). To achieve this, the responsibilities of the hospitality and tourism sectors at the local level include creating strong connections among local tourism businesses, DMOs, and public health authorities; supporting groups that face discrimination and racism; and encouraging domestic residents and critical stakeholders to practice ethics of care (Jamal & Budke, 2020). Ultimately, although policies for sustainable tourism are formulated by governmental authorities, transforming policies into practical actions relies on people's acceptance and adoption of responsible tourism.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created opportunities for the transformation of tourist behaviour into a more responsible direction, guided by the roadmap of sustainable tourism. However, the post-pandemic reset of tourism will be insufficient if it solely relies on approaches at the corporate level; rather, the reset needs to be supported by a tourism framework that is community-centred to redefine and reorient tourism in a manner that upholds the rights and interests of local communities and residents (Higgins-Desbiolles,

2020). In addition, the pandemic calls for regenerative tourism that adds value to destinations in the form of enhanced resident quality of life and the promotion of ecosystem health (Young, 2021). An example is the Malaysian state of Sarawak, where much emphasis is put on the community involvement and empowerment to develop the “green and gold” tourism in Bau in a responsible manner (We Are United, 2021). Moreover, industry-wide vaccination completion for the tourism and event sectors in the state signals the safe preparation of tourism for its much-awaited re-opening after the pandemic (Borneo Post Online, 2021). The vaccination programme is consistent with the shift in traveler perceptions of their own actions and expectations of the tourism sector, which now have a greater focus on ethics, inclusion, and responsibility (Perdomo, 2021).

The Cape Town Declaration put forward the responsibility of the sector to make tourism more sustainable. To this end, responsible tourism validates the responsibility of operators, hoteliers, governments, locals, and tourists in taking action to contribute to sustainable tourism (Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018), as it minimises negative impacts on the economy, environment, and society while benefitting local communities, preserving natural and cultural heritage, and promoting inclusivity for disabled and disadvantaged people (Goodwin, 2014). Thus, responsible tourism has emerged as the central framework for assessing the tourism sector from various research perspectives (Bramwell et al., 2008). Moving forward from the pandemic crisis, one of the leading roles of tourism scholars henceforth is to facilitate high quality education and training to prepare future leaders and responsible tourism practitioners to contribute to responsible travel and tourism experiences, such as by redesigning curricula (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020) and implementing a nature-based experiential learning framework (Zhang et al., 2021).

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