Original Article

The elusiveness of sustainability in tourism: The culture-ideology of consumerism and its implications

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ABSTRACT Sustainable tourism is perhaps the most prominent feature of contemporary tourism discourse. However, despite its prominence for several decades, achieving sustainability remains as elusive as ever. This article explores the concept of the culture-ideology of consumerism developed by sociologist Leslie Sklair (2002) in order to ascertain the implications it holds for understanding how to secure meaningful sustainable tourism. Demonstrating that the current system of neoliberalism and its attendant culture-ideology of consumerism are inherently unsustainable, this article argues we must consciously move away from this value system to one less damaging.
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INTRODUCTION

The application of sustainability principles to tourism is the predominant issue in current tourism discourse. There have been some substantial recent publications on sustainability in tourism, for example, Aronsson, 2000; Butler, 1999a; Miller and Twining-Ward, 2005; Mowforth and Munt, 2003. Its profile is confirmed by any brief survey of tourism textbooks, tourism brochures, institutional websites of organisations such as the World Tourism Organization, annual reports of global tourism players such as British Airways, as well as in the discourse of ordinary travellers who are increasingly aware of their impacts on the environment. The drive to sustainability was prompted by the development of general concern with sustainable development as well as interest in developing alternatives that might make the mass tourism market more sustainable. However,

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despite a long engagement with the concept of sustainability, much of the tourism industry remains alarmingly unsustainable in an era when human resource use is becoming an obviously vital issue. This article will examine the concept of the culture-ideology of consumerism outlined by sociologist Leslie Sklair in his development of a 'sociology of the global system' (1991, 2002). This theory will be analysed in order to glean insights into the dynamics of contemporary tourism and its current limitations in achieving sustainability.

SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM

Since the release of the document *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987), or the Brundtland Report as it became known, sustainability has become a buzzword affecting every field of human endeavour, including tourism. The definition of sustainability in tourism is contentious; the proper terminology is not even subject to agreement as some analysts use the simple term 'sustainable tourism', others specify 'ecologically sustainable tourism' (Dowling, 2000, p. 160), while others view 'sustainable development in tourism' as more appropriate (Wall, 1997). Additionally, confusion is added when some analysts use the terms alternative tourism, ecotourism and sustainability in tourism as if they are synonymous, leading to imprecision, confusion and failure to address important concerns in tourism (Shaw and Williams, 2002, p. 302). In recent times, sustainability discourse has been a main driver of a movement advocating 'doing tourism differently' by highlighting tourism's negative environmental impacts and proposing concomitant tactical approaches to mitigating these impacts.

Butler provides a useful and concise definition of sustainable tourism as 'tourism which is in a form which can maintain its viability in an area for an indefinite period of time' (1999b, p. 36). He differentiates this concept from 'tourism in the context of sustainable development', which he describes as:

> Tourism which is developed and maintained in the area (community, environment) in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an indefinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (human and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and wellbeing of other activities and processes. (Butler, 1999b, p. 35)

Extrapolating from Butler, Wall argues that an important distinction must be drawn between 'sustainable tourism' and 'sustainable development in the context of tourism' (1997, p. 486). For Wall, sustainable tourism implies a focus upon tourism as a single force and thereby shifts its meaning to 'sustaining tourism'. In contrast, a focus on the latter implies a more holistic perspective encompassing all the sectors relevant to development, with tourism being one tool for development that is utilised as and when appropriate. Thus the former is aimed at sustaining the tourism industry, while the latter is geared to meeting the 'greater good' or human needs through tourism (Wall, 1997, p. 486). This latter understanding also offers the notion of limits and appropriate prioritisation, as tourism becomes embedded in social and environmental contexts, and not viewed merely as an economic phenomenon.

However, after more than two decades of tourism industry engagement with sustainability, its effectiveness has been questioned. As Butler (1999b) and Wall (1997) have asserted, contemporary definitions of sustainability in tourism can be interpreted as meaning sustaining the tourism industry rather than limiting it to protect the environment or cultures and societies. Butler has noted the tendency of the tourism industry to ignore the implications of the limits that the sustainability concept implies, including limiting tourist numbers, infrastructure development and landscape changes (1999a, p. 15). Fennell and Ebert say that a call to apply the precautionary principle to tourism 'has led to a backlash … because it accentuates the process of pulling back the reins on unfettered growth' (2004, p. 475). Hostility to limits

of any sort is evident in the work of Bob McKercher, who warns that ecologically sustainable development principles stand as a threat to the survival of tourism for their role in fostering 'pernicious land management policies that effectively restrict tourism access to and use of public lands' (1993, p. 131). It is also apparent in the opposition of the tourism industry to the use of the limits of acceptable change model for planning tourism on Kangaroo Island, South Australia because it implied limiting tourism development. What the tourism industry secured was the development of a Tourism Optimisation Management Model, which, instead of designating limits, identifies and sets 'optimal uses' of resources for tourism (Jack, n.d.). This is now being promoted as a 'best practice' model in sustainability (Miller and Twining-Ward, 2005). Because of this resistance to restrictions, limits and costs, tourism's approach to sustainability has been labelled greenwash (Beder, 2000; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2007). Indicative of how little things have changed despite the longevity of sustainability discourse, 'environmental watchdog' Responsibletravel.com alleged 'operators [are] paying only lip service to sustainable tourism' and criticised three major European operators, TUI, Thomas Cook and MyTravel, for failing to shift to sustainable practices in their relationships with tourism destinations (Travelmole.com, 2004).

The critiques offered by Brian Wheeller are illuminative. Wheeller contends that the tourism industry has appropriated the language of sustainability in order to achieve public relations outcomes: 'while dovetailing perfectly with notions of a quality caring industry that has developed a self-rectifying mechanism, globally, it is patently obvious that the "bugger it up and pass it down" … philosophy has been employed' (1993, p. 125). He unveils the future of tourism as heading to 'mega-mass tourism' as tourists and travel destinations proliferate with the promotion of global tourism. The reality globally is 'a capitalist society with inbuilt growth dynamics and a "get it while you can", grab mentality', but the rhetoric of alternative tourism and sustainability with their 'slow, steady, selfless, cosy, back to nature, sustainable, eco-friendly, controlled small-scale solution to tourism problems' (Wheeller, 1993, p. 126) continue to be deployed to deceive. He asserts that the proponents who advocate sustainable tourism as the answer to the problems of mass tourism are right:

> Sustainable tourism does provide the answer. Unfortunately it is the wrong question. Rather than effectively addressing the complexities of tourism impact, what it is actually achieving is the considerably easier task of answering the question – 'How best can we cope with the criticism of tourism impact?' – as opposed to the impact itself. In essence then, the solution has been conjuring up an intellectually appealing concept with little practical application. One that satisfies the immediate short-term wishes of some of the main protagonists in tourism's impact debate, avoids sacrifices and enables behaviour in much the same way as before – but with the veneer of respectability and from a higher moral platform. (1993, p. 122)

Wheeller's work alerts us to pay attention to the wider context presented by a globalising capitalism, which promotes dynamics that are contradictory to achieving sustainable tourism. This discussion will now turn to Sklair's theory of the culture-ideology of consumerism in order to utilise it in assessing the potential for tourism in its current form to effectively achieve sustainability.

SKLAIR'S DISCUSSION OF THE CULTURE-IDEOLOGY OF CONSUMERISM IN THE CONTEXT OF CAPITALIST GLOBALISATION

Like sustainability, globalisation has captured the attention of the public and academia. The term 'global babble' has been used to describe the cacophany of views on globalisation

(Abu-Lughod, 1991). Unable to engage with the breadth of globalisation literature, this artcle will focus on the critique of capitalist globalisation offered by Leslie Sklair (2002), which provides a model against which the processes of contemporary tourism can be analysed (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006a).

Sociologist Leslie Sklair has formulated an analysis of globalisation, which has much to offer. Sklair describes his theory as a 'sociology of the global system', which, although informed by the thinking of many other analysts of globalisation, was a radically new analysis when he first introduced it in his *Sociology of the global system* in 1991. In his later edition entitled *Globalization, capitalism and its alternatives* (2002), Sklair provides a valuable critique of what he calls capitalist globalisation and uses this as a springboard to contemplate an alternative globalisation that resolves the crises that capitalist globalisation produces. Sklair's model of globalisation is more holistic and comprehensive than most through his focus on transnational practices (TNPs) that encompass economic, political and cultural-ideological spheres (2002). While Sklair concentrates largely on the experiences of the developing world, because this is where capitalism and consumerism are now being imposed, his analysis remains equally relevant for the people of the developed world.

Sklair views TNPs as the building blocks of globalisation. These TNPs are the basis of the transcendence of national boundaries as countries become more bound together; they occupy the physical spaces of globalisation; they are present wherever transnational corporations (TNCs) are operating; members of the transnational capitalist class (TCC) meet and mingle and the culture-ideology of consumerism takes hold (2002, p. 86). Understanding how these TNPs contribute to the 'capitalist project' requires examining the particular types of TNPs (economic, political and cultural-ideological) and then addressing how each TNP type is secured by its attendant structural form. However, owing to the focus of this article, only the cultural-ideological TNPs will be examined here.

Cultural-ideological TNPs are social phenomena that cross borders and are often identified as the driving force behind globalisation, which other analysts have characterised as Americanisation, Westernisation (Barber, 1996) or McDonaldisation (Ritzer, 1996). Cultural-ideological TNPs are manifest in such diverse phenomena as global communications through internet chatrooms and Facebook, in concepts like McLuhan's 'global village' (1962), in the global spread of Western youth culture and in the development of a global environmental movement. However, it is how these TNPs manifest themselves under capitalist globalisation that is of interest to Sklair. Key to this is the structural form of the culture-ideology of consumerism, which accompanies and promotes certain cultural-ideological TNPs (2002, p. 107). The culture-ideology of consumerism is a new phenomenon that has arisen owing to the correlation of two simultaneous circumstances – the globalisation of capitalism and a powerful media, particularly the advertising industry, able to hail its bounties to everyone (p. 108). While consumerism is not new, the culture-ideology of consumerism is a distinct phenomenon as it promotes a consumerist 'worldview'. In effect, under capitalist globalisation, efforts of media and other agents of the culture-ideology of consumerism are geared towards controlling the 'realm of ideas' in order to ensure that endless consumption underpins the whole of the capitalist system (Sklair, 2002, p. 115). As Sklair notes, the role of consumerism is the key – 'without consumerism, the rationale for continuous capitalist accumulation dissolves' (p. 116). Its impact is tremendous as commercialisation and commodification is extended to every sphere of endeavour resulting in what Habermas terms 'the colonization of the lifeworld' (cited in Sklair, 2002, p. 116). Such dynamics are also apparent in corporatised tourism. The term corporatised tourism describes the tourism system operating according to the precepts of

capitalist globalisation. It includes the power demonstrated by the TNCs that have achieved 'vertical integration' through ownership of such diverse sectors of the tourism and travel industry as travel wholesalers, travel companies, airlines, currency exchange, computer reservation systems, accommodation providers and travel book publishers. Examples include the Thomas Cook Travel Group and TUI A. G. Under globalising capitalism, these powerful TNCs and their TCC cohorts are able to manipulate tourism to maximise their profits and provide exclusive holidays for elite tourist clients, often to the detriment of local communities. The logic of corporatised tourism is based on exploitation and commodification of all factors of production including people, cultures and environments. Both alternative and mass tourism can be corporatised as each sector is a lucrative source of profits in a diversifying market. In such circumstances, communities are encouraged and pressured to sell their cultures, their lifeways and in some cases, even their very people on the global market.

One of the significant points of Sklair's analysis is that he admits that capitalism does deliver the goods, so to speak, at least to some in some places. The reason that the capitalist system has been able to be transplanted to the economies and societies of the developing world is because the promise of development and the enticements of consumerism are desired and believed to be attainable by peoples and governments all around the globe. As Sklair states:

> The ultimate strength of capitalist globalization is that it continually works, and works very hard to persuade people that the system is natural, fair and fundamentally better than any realistic alternative. (2002, p. 118)

Current development orthodoxy encourages developing countries to integrate their economies into the global market as the best path to development. Aspects of this process include seeking foreign direct investment, siting of TNC production in their locales, orienting economies to export-led production, promoting themselves as tourist destinations and implementation of IMF structural adjustment programmes. For Sklair, it is important how each of these strategies serves capitalist globalisation.

For example, on the issue of TNCs, Sklair states that like all businesses, TNCs seek profits (2002, p. 122). What is at issue is how they secure their profits. Radicals have criticised TNCs as exploitative of labour or as promoters of consumption, but that is only part of the picture. Under capitalist globalisation, TNCs' roles are supported by powerful agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF, which advise countries to adopt policies that serve TNC interests; aid agencies fund programmes implemented through TNCs in a way that aid seems to be more targeted to assist business than the poor; and TNCs bring with them a culture-ideology that transforms the society not only by introducing 'business culture' into the economic sphere, but also promoting consumerism to the wider society (Sklair, 2002, pp. 122–123).

This issue brings us to the problem of capitalist globalisation driven in particular by TNCs. Where focus is on the roles of TNCs operating in developing countries, concern is over trade. However, a shift in focus to the goals of states, who receive TNC investment, would prioritise development. The goals of states should be the developmental welfare of their peoples. However, as Sklair demonstrates in his case study of the global food system, the priorities of capitalist globalisation lead to an emphasis on export production to meet the demand of wealthy consumers at the expense of subsistence production that feeds the poor (pp. 138–152). We can see similar dynamics in the tourism arena, where countries such as Thailand are encouraged to orient their economies to making their nation's tourism destinations often to the detriment of the developmental needs of the people (Pleumarom, 1999). As Sklair states, 'the point at issue … is not whether

a corporation and its practices are foreign, but to what extent they work in the interests of capitalist globalization … or in the interests of the majority of the population' (p. 152).

However, there is another side to the developmental effects of capitalist globalisation in developing communities. In addition to the growth of TNC investment in Third World production gearing these countries to export production, there are the important effects of promoting the culture-ideology of consumerism in these same countries. Sklair notes that of all of the value systems that could be fostered in developing communities, capitalist globalisation serves to promote the culture-ideology of consumerism (2002). While debating whether consumerism versus producerism is the best path to development, Sklair argues that what is clear is that while consumerism may be difficult to connect to a state's developmental interest it is very easy to '… see how consumerism can be said to serve the interests of the capitalist global system' (p. 166).

> Capitalist globalization in the Third World depends on the successful promotion of the culture-ideology of consumerism among people with no regard for their ability to produce for themselves, and only with an indirect regard for their ability to pay for what they are consuming. Development assistance (aid), for example, moves funds from taxpayers in rich countries to consumers in poor countries, but not always for appropriate forms of consumption, not to speak of what is siphoned off in corrupt deals or stolen. In this sense consumerism has nothing to do with satisfying biological needs, for people will satisfy these needs without any prompting from anyone else, but with creating what can be called induced wants. (Sklair, 2002, p. 166)

These induced wants that are the mainstay of the culture-ideology of consumerism are generated in a number of ways, including what has been labelled cultural and media imperialism. What we find in this analysis is that the promise of the new communications technologies is not turned to developmental purposes, such as education, as they were at first anticipated to do, but instead turned to the consumerist message of advertising. This may be in the form of entertainment such as television soap operas (which Sklair discusses as a vehicle for capitalist consumerism, p. 170), or advertising through cultural events through sponsorship agreements, or the association of a product with a lifestyle (for example the consumption of a cola drink evoking participation in (Western) youth culture).

Sklair assiduously avoids the debates that have embroiled those in cultural studies concerning the susceptibility of people in developing communities to advertising and media. Instead what he suggests is that rather than being dupes of this 'media' or 'cultural imperialism', people in developing communities are making rational choices that involve them in the consumerist project (2002, pp. 173–174). These consumerist products and experiences that they seek to purchase are attractive because they are cheaper than locally produced ones; they make life easier; and/or they tap into symbolic power and meanings through their conferring of status and prestige (Sklair, 2002, p. 173). Sklair contends that '… consumerism of capitalist globalization has a universal form but with the permanent potential of national-local cultural contents' (2002, p. 183). He elaborates his theoretical discussion with four case studies in global consumerism (the baby bottle feed controversy; drugs, health and profits; the cola wars; and the global smoking industry) to illustrate two main points: one, that consumerism serves to promote consumption of non-essential products that may not be developmental, and can be deleterious or even deadly; and secondly, that capitalist globalisation serves to raise '… consumerist expectations that cannot be satisfied within the foreseeable future for billions of people around the world' (p. 204). The global tourism industry presents another useful case

study for analysis of the dynamics of global consumerism.

CULTURE-IDEOLOGY OF CONSUMERISM AND THE RIGHT TO TRAVEL

Conventional wisdom of current societies sees consumption as an expression of individuality and freedom. Hall suggests that such a perspective is misleading as tourism and leisure consumption in capitalist systems is increasingly commodified, standardised and industrialised; he asserts 'the ideology of "consumer sovereignty" disguises the extent to which capital controls leisure' (1994, pp. 192–193).

According to Sklair, the culture-ideology of consumerism is a key linchpin of capitalist globalisation (2002). As Sklair states 'consumerism has nothing to do with satisfying biological needs, for people will seek to satisfy these needs without any prompting from anyone, but with creating what can be called induced wants' (2002, p. 166). Tourism is a good example of consumerism as it is clearly one of these 'induced wants'. It is mostly a hedonistic leisure activity and is thus an item of optional consumption, which the advertising profession and tourism industry continually tells us we need. The major ideological underpinning of consumerism in tourism is the notion of the right to travel and tourism. This conceptualisation of the right to travel and tourism, however, is not underpinned by the concept of human rights found in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (see Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006b), but rather predicated on one's ability to pay in the current system of capitalist globalisation. This results in the privileged being able to fulfil their rights, while the less privileged work as 'servers' or 'hosts' to the privileged holidaymakers. As Hall notes, 'tourism is … very much part of the competition for and consumption of scarce resources …' (Hall, 1994, p. 195). Since the latter half of the twentieth century, the privileged have come to view tourism and travel not as a luxury, but a right and a necessity. With capitalist globalisation, this conceptualisation of the right to travel has dovetailed nicely with the culture-ideology of consumerism. Two aspects of the culture-ideology of consumerism evident in the right to travel and tourism will be explored here: the psychological impact on the 'consumer', or the tourist, and the neo-imperialistic nature of the relationship it creates between the tourists and the toured, or 'hosts'.

First, the culture-ideology of consumerism expressed through the capitalistic conception of the right to travel has very interesting psychological and sociological impacts on potential tourists and their societies. In addressing consumerism, Sklair uses the phrase 'the great project of global consumerism' (2002, p. 196), which an individual can buy into through the small purchase of a can of cola or the more illusive holiday under discussion here. This reveals the psychological and sociological effects of current consumerism, that is the individual 'buys into' consumerist society and asserts their identity no longer through citizenship but through consuming. Thus, for the consuming individual, participating in consumerism goes to the heart of personal and social identity; you are literally nobody if you cannot assert your identity and belonging through your consumption practices.

These dynamics also hold true in the contemporary tourism realm. A psychotherapist contributing to the travel section of the *Guardian* newspaper put our current conceptualisation of the right to travel in perspective when he questioned why holidays have become so important to people:

> Of course, it's because of expectations, affluence, the media, peer pressure, a shrinking world, etc. You could even say a kind of brainwashing. We feel that we deserve a holiday. In fact, we deserve two or three. Obviously, this has a lot to do with the availability of cheaper travel, and the growth in the time that exists, or we think should exist, for recreation and pleasure. But if you need something in

> order to be OK, then next time you will need more. (Kirsh, 2003)

It is this dissatisfaction, the fact that 'next time you will need more', that drives the culture and ideology of consumerism that underpins capitalist globalisation. The more one experiences, the more one needs, and this contributes to the growing profits of the TNCs and serves the interests of the TCC. The inherent dissatisfaction found in consumerism is what spurs the 'growth fetish' that Hamilton has found as the most important dynamic of our market system (2003). This has significant psychological implications as clinical psychologist Bruce Levine has noted:

> It is difficult to protect oneself from the slow death caused by consumer culture. Human beings are every day and in numerous ways psychologically, socially, and spiritually assaulted by a culture which:
> - creates increasing material expectations
> - devalues human connectedness
> - socialises people to be self-absorbed
> - obliterates self-reliance
> - alienates people from normal human emotional reactions
> - sells false hope that creates more pain. (2009)

Perhaps a sign of the potential pathologies of the right to travel fostered by the culture-ideology of consumerism is the recent phenomenon seen in the United Kingdom where parents, particularly single mothers, abandon their children to go on holiday. One mother trying to explain her actions to a woman's magazine stated 'Everyone needs to let their hair down. My kids want for nothing. They have a wardrobe full of clothes and an attic full of toys' ('Holidaying Mother Charged with Neglect', 2005). One might choose to condemn this as an act of individual selfishness, but a considered analysis of the role of the culture-ideology of the right to travel is also called for. Advertising in all of its forms publicises that we all have a right to consume and holiday and somehow makes us feel less than adequate as people if we cannot. Could this make the underprivileged feel desperate to participate in consumer activities in order to give meaning to life and a sense of participation in the 'good life' that living in capitalist societies most often denies them? While this is an extremely rare illustrative case, it is not hard to see the pressures of consumer ideology in the wider society as ordinary people no longer hesitate to undertake increasing levels of debt to secure their dream holiday, an item once only purchased with discretionary income. For instance, according to a Summer Vacation survey in May 2003 by Myvesta.org, nearly 50 per cent of Americans planned to take a summer vacation, and over three-quarters (78 per cent) planned to purchase through credit card debt (MacDonald, n.d.).

As Sklair cautions, it is easy to fall into a trap of moralising about what is or is not proper and acceptable consumption, but that is not the point of his analysis of the culture-ideology of consumerism (2002, p. 187). The point of such an analysis is to demonstrate that under capitalist globalisation these induced wants are pressured upon people by a relentless torrent of 'brainwashing' – pervasive media outlets constantly bombard us with billboard ads on the way to work, commercial television and radio, 'women's magazines', film and music. Concerned with the impacts of the culture-ideology of consumerism on the developing world, Sklair contends that 'the culture-ideology of consumerism creates a form of cultural dependency' and quotes Elizabeth Cardova's ironic definition: 'Cultural dependency means people in our country have to brush their teeth three times a day, even if they don't have anything to eat' (Sklair, 2002, p. 187). What we see with the 'children abandoned for holiday' phenomenon and the debt accumulated to enjoy holidays is that the inequities and pathologies of the culture-ideology of consumerism are not limited to the developing world; it

is in effect wherever capitalist globalisation holds sway. Hamilton articulately explains the self-reinforcing system that global capitalism and consumerism create:

> At its heart … globalisation is not so much about the deepening of economic and financial networks or the extension of the international reach of corporations; it is about the restless spread of the ideology of growth and consumer capitalism … . While the motive force is the accumulation of wealth through profit seeking, the ideology draws its legitimacy from the core belief that human well-being is advanced above all else by increasing the quantity and quality of goods and services consumed by individuals. This gives privileged place to all activities and policies that promise an increase in the rate of economic growth. Parallel with this formal set of beliefs are cultural forms of behaviour that place enormous emphasis on consumption as the foundation lifestyle. This is why there has been so little resistance to globalisation … . (2003, pp. 119–120)

As the privileged assert their right to tourism and travel to the less expensive and more exotic destinations of the developing world, the ideology of the right to travel can be characterised as a neo-imperialist phenomenon. The privileged assert their rights, while the poor and the marginalised serve and host them on their holidays, in order to eke out a living, try to pay off the debts fostered by capitalist globalisation and hopefully eventually to enjoy their moment as consumers. This is well described by Bauman, who claims the tourists 'pay for their freedom; the right to disregard native concerns and feelings, the right to spin their own web of meanings … . The world is the tourist's oyster … to be lived pleasurably – and thus given meaning' (1993, p. 241). Tourism under capitalist globalisation makes the world's places and peoples a product for consumption; 'for the twentieth-century tourist, the world has become one large department store of countrysides and cities' (Schivelbusch, 1986, p. 197). As part of this equation, developing countries are cajoled and pressured into catering to tourists through the pressures of debt and the need for capital, with the result that practically no community is able to completely extricate itself from the tourism circuit. Crick puts tourism consumption in a capitalist context in useful perspective:

> Tourism is the conspicuous consumption of resources accumulated in secular time; its very possibility, in other words, is securely rooted in the real world of gross political and economic inequalities between nations and classes. In fact … tourism is doubly imperialistic; not only does it make a spectacle of the Other, making cultures into consumer items, tourism is also an opiate of the masses in the affluent countries themselves. (Crick cited in Hall, 1994, p. 196)

The ambiguities and perceived imposed nature of tourism on some communities is poignantly exposed by a Balinese academic, who described the Bali bombing of 2002 as a 'good thing' because it would stop foreign tourists from coming to Bali temporarily and give the Balinese a chance to reconsider their engagement with mass tourism and perhaps, even persuade some to return to traditional and subsistence activities (Ellis, 2002, p. 4). While we could blame the imposition of tourism on vulnerable host societies upon the tourists or upon the governments who offer their people up to the tourism marketplace, MacCannell's (1992) analysis indicates this might not be a sufficient explanation. In his discussion of the 'performative primitive' or 'ex-primitive', MacCannell shows that many people from host communities who find themselves on the tourism circuit willingly engage with tourism and play the role the tourists expect (1992, p. 30). They are not the 'exploited' peoples that unsophisticated tourism critics describe,

as they willingly engage with tourism as a way of accessing the goods and services of the capitalistic economy. For MacCannell, the exploitation lies in the 'cannibalism' of capitalist globalisation, which forces a 'cannibal incorporation' as everyone, both tourist and 'performative primitive', is forcibly brought into the capitalistic system; 'the corporations promote this "inevitable incorporation" with an aggressiveness that can only be labelled "savage"' (1992, p. 68).

The precarious nature of this system is now apparent in the aftermath of the recent 'global financial crisis'. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd of Australia has recently written:

> The time has come, off the back of the current crisis, to proclaim that the great neo-liberal experiment of the past 30 years has failed, that the emperor has no clothes. Neoliberalism, and the free-market fundamentalism it has produced, has been revealed as little more than personal greed dressed up as an economic philosophy. And, ironically, it now falls to social democracy to prevent liberal capitalism from cannibalising itself. (2009, p. 25)

While the crisis has undermined support for the excesses of neoliberalism, or what Rudd here calls market fundamentalism, the underlying culture of consumerism and the pro-growth fetish that accompanies it remain currently unchallenged. It is clear we are as yet unready to face the fact that the savagery of this system demands its undoing. At a time of the worst global financial crisis in 50 years caused by the destructive dynamics of capitalist globalisation, governments are funding financial stimulus packages worth trillions of dollars in order to fund consumer spending to avoid systemic collapse. More significantly, the financial crisis has been used as an excuse to put aside our environmental concerns and sidetrack our commitments to address climate change, despite the warnings that the ecological system is giving us that the resources we consume and the pollutions we emit in sustaining consumerism are taking us to the finite limits of the Earth's capacity. Our obligations to future generations, other species inhabiting the planet with us and even ourselves, demand that we now face the implications of our actions and change course dramatically.

IMPLICATIONS

From this discussion, it becomes clear that sustainable tourism necessitates a clear-eyed engagement with notions of limits that the current culture of consumerism and pro-growth ideology precludes. Other disciplines have engaged with the implications of sustainability and have considered how the growth fetish of current economies must be reined in; tourism analysts could learn from these analyses. For instance, Escobar and other analysts in the development discipline have advocated a post-development stance that eschews the universalising tendencies of current economic discourse and instead advocates local agency, diverse options and alternatives to development. Escobar, in particular, is against the 'erasure of place' that occurs with capitalist globalisation and suggests instead that we make 'visible practices of cultural and ecological difference which could serve as the basis of alternatives' (2001, p. 155). The marketing field, the field *par excellence* of consumerism, has recently engaged with anti-consumption discourses and considered the ways marketing may be used to discourage the culture-ideology of consumerism and the ways this may contribute to an identity formation separate from consumption practices (Cherrier, 2009). The tourism industry must also engage with this thorny issue of the culture-ideology of consumerism if sustainable tourism is to have any meaning beyond merely sustaining industry profits.

Hall has recently made such a contribution, which reinforces the importance of addressing this issue. He advocates 'degrowing tourism' by consciously rejecting the pro-growth focus of the current system, fostering 'sustainable consumption' and transforming our goal

towards achieving a 'steady-state tourism' (Hall, forthcoming). The steady-state tourism concept describes a 'tourism system that encourages qualitative development but not aggregate quantitative growth to the detriment of natural capital' (Hall, 2009, p. 57).

The paths to such a transformation are multiple, including a change in consumer behaviour, a regime of regulation, and a transformation in values and ideologies. Possibilities are already before us in the consumer sphere particularly found in the alternative tourism movement. For instance, there is an incipient slow tourism movement that follows the path of the slow food movement, advocating a more leisured pace to holidays and a deeper engagement with a fewer number of destinations in order to more meaningfully experience a place and its people. Volunteer tourism is an increasingly popular phenomenon, which describes people undertaking '… holidays that may involve the aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment' (Wearing, 2002, p. 240). More radically, we may see an acceptance of the need to holiday closer to home or even at home. This may become imperative for greater numbers of people as the global financial crisis hits, the finite energy resources we rely on become scarcer and full environmental costing of our activities makes our old patterns prohibitively expensive or impossible. Rather than decry these developments, we should embrace such possibilities as they invite us to think more imaginatively about the meaning, purpose and impacts of our tourism and travel cultures. For instance, holidaying closer to home may provide us with greater connections to our community and its environment, thereby combating the sense of alienation increasingly evident in our globalising world and fostering an appreciation of our own environment that is conducive to a commitment to sustainability. Figure 1 contrasts the values underpinning contemporary corporatised tourism and the emergent alternative

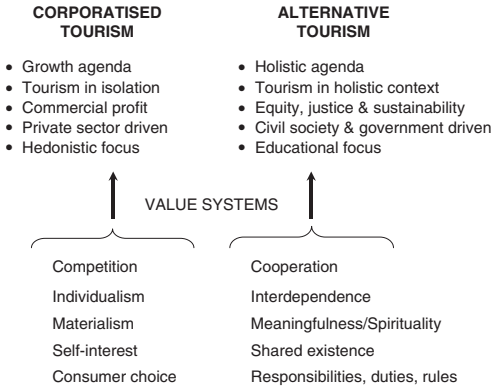

Figure 1: Contrasting value systems for the corporatised and alternative tourism paradigms.

tourism paradigm, which is visible in new phenomena such as slow tourism and volunteer tourism. Our acceptance of the ubiquity of the culture-ideology of consumerism limits us in seeing how we are in fact enslaved by these induced travel motivations rather than fulfilled by them. The emerging wellness tourism movement may offer us an opportunity to rethink the meaning of tourism and reorient our tourism and travel choices to our long-term well being and fulfilment, if it is not indeed usurped and corrupted by the 'cannibal incorporation' of corporatised tourism.

However, transformations in consumer behaviour are not sufficient to achieve the changes necessary. Regulation of tourism and travel behaviour will be essential in an era of exploding population growth, increasing demands for more equitable consumption among these populations and in a context of a finite natural system whose limits we have already exceeded. Most obvious and remaining in the market paradigm is the need for realistic pricing that incorporates environmental costs in tourism and travel products and services, which would significantly raise the costs of these goods to the consumer. The current practice of voluntary purchase of carbon-offsets is wholly unsatisfactory and reinforces the need for enforced regulations to achieve sustainable

tourism. More extreme measures may be required, which the tourism industry will find less palatable, if we cannot secure substantial changes quickly enough through influencing the nature of consumer demand, including possible rationing regimes.

Finally, and most importantly, we need to foster alternative value systems and ideologies that are more conducive to living sustainably in a finite world than those offered by our current system predicated on consumption and growth. Hall has outlined some of the possibilities including 'slow consumption' and 'degrowth', which he describes as living within sustainable limits which are '… not so much connected to downsizing per se but to the notion of "right-sizing"' (2009, p. 55). What is required is a considerable change in priorities towards quality of life, living within ecological parameters and in a context of social relationships, which are guiding us towards notions of global citizenship and away from the materialism, selfishness and individualism promoted by the culture-ideology of consumption.

Such a transition will be difficult to achieve; however, the finite parameters of our ecological system and the social pressures that are building will necessitate fundamental changes in tourism and travel behaviours that will be pressed on the tourism industry eventually. A proactive engagement by enlightened industry and government leaders would be a more desirable course of action, as the shock of forcibly curtailed consumerism could have significant societal repercussions we would find difficult to currently imagine.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the culture-ideology of consumerism as expressed in the right to travel and tourism asserted in an era of corporatised tourism thus points to a system premised on continual growth, which is inherently unsustainable in this era where we are experiencing the reality of the limits of the Earth's finite resources. While voices are saying that the foundations of modern tourism (from the car used for the domestic holiday (Jenkins, 2006), to the airplane that has offered cheap and easy international travel, to the ever-expanding territorial range of tourism developments to cater to the expanding numbers of holiday-makers) are clearly unsustainable, the tourism industry continues to chant the mantra of growth in every conceivable tool of communications at its disposal with few exceptions. This article has shown that the culture-ideology of consumerism that underpins this growth is at odds with the demand for limits that sustainability requires. Recent events, rather than presenting us with crises, may indeed be offering us vital and timely opportunities to consciously move away from a destructive value system to other value systems more conducive to achieving sustainability.

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