

Sustainable Tourism Future

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The content of this course was developed by faculty from the following institutions:



Using the UNs SDGs as a Framework for Sustainable Tourism Futures

Learning Outcomes

- To critically examine the presentation and articulation of the 17 SDGs.
- To critically consider the way tourism is positioned as a catalyst for driving change in the articulation of the SDGs.
- To understand the critiques confronting SDG progress.
- To critically reflect on the framework presented to progress sustainability in tourism.

Pre-Module Readings

- UN (2019). [Nations United: Urgent Solutions for Urgent Times. Presented by Thandie Newton](#). Accessed on 08 18 2021. Accessed at: (34 min video “Nations United” reflects pre-pandemic).
- Boluk, K., Cavaliere, C.T., & Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2021). (Eds). A critical framework for interrogating the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda in Tourism. In K. Boluk, C. Cavaliere, & F. Higgins-Desbiolles. *Activating Critical Thinking to Advance the Sustainable Development Goals in Tourism Systems*. London: Routledge.

Issues with Entitlement to Travel



The study and analysis of sustainable tourism has occupied significant attention in the scholarly literature (e.g., Boluk, Cavaliere & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2019; 2021; Bramwell et al., 2017; Hall, 2019; Wheeler, 1993).

So much so, that we have entire journals in our field (such as the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *Sustainability*, *Journal of Ecotourism* etc.) specifically devoted to understanding how the tourism sector contributes to sustainability concerns and conversely how tourism may be a force for creating positive impacts. The journals that emphasize sustainability in tourism have served as an impetus for tourism scholars to foreground important questions pertaining to the impacts generated by the sector.

One reason why tourism scholars lead such research is because we can no longer afford to ignore the environmental, socio-cultural, and political injustices and implications, wrapped up in our decisions and entitlement to travel.

The picture in this slide taken on January 11, 2021 depicts overtourism at the Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Despite the coronavirus pandemic, overtourism is still a growing problem and is one contributor to crises the tourism sector faces. The COVID-19 pandemic (health crisis), Pollution in our water system (environmental crisis), unbalanced access to tourism, and children skipping school to beg from tourists (humanitarian crisis) are all examples of the crises tourism propels.

Prior to March 11, 2020 when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic (Ghebreyesus, 2020), the impacts of the climate crisis, various unsustainable approaches and practices, and overtourism occupied the focus of tourism scholarship.



The image displays the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) arranged in a grid. Each goal is represented by a colored square with a white icon and text. The goals are: 1. No Poverty (red), 2. Zero Hunger (orange), 3. Good Health and Well-being (green), 4. Quality Education (blue), 5. Gender Equality (red), 6. Clean Water and Sanitation (light blue), 7. Affordable and Clean Energy (yellow), 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth (purple), 9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (orange), 10. Reduced Inequalities (pink), 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities (light blue), 12. Responsible Consumption and Production (yellow), 13. Climate Action (green), 14. Life Below Water (blue), 15. Life on Land (green), 16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (blue), 17. Partnerships for the Goals (blue). The UN logo and the text 'SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS' are at the top left of the grid.

UN SDGs

- [Tourism for SDGs Platform – Introduction video](#)
- [Test your SDG Knowledge](#)

The failure of achieving the 8 Millennium Development Goals (ranging from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education) served as the impetus for the United Nations to enhance their blueprint leading to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. The SDGs emerged in 2015 and the target set to achieve the goals is 2030.

The SDGs serve as a ‘call to action’ for all countries to promote prosperity, well-being, and protect the interests of the planet. The goals are intentionally broad and interdependent. Specifically, the SDGs were created as part of a new sustainable development agenda to address the world’s most pressing problems with respect to ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity for all by the year 2030 (UN, 2015).

There is evidence that the halt in tourism has led to some environmental benefits e.g., the 17% decrease in carbon emissions noted in early April 2020 ([Le Quéré et al., 2020](#)); however, we know that COVID-19 has derailed progress (e.g., SDG1 No Poverty, SDG2 Zero Hunger, SDG 4 Quality Education, SDG5 Gender Equality etc.) in progressing and achieving the goals. As such, the SDGs are now being promoted as a critical framework for supporting a COVID-19 recovery.

The short (1 min 44 second) youtube video provides a quick overview of the SDGs.

The second link here is for a Sustainable Development Quiz take a few minutes and respond to the 17 questions to assess your personal level of knowledge on the SDGs.

Watch 'Nations United' for a better grasp regarding some of the specific SDGs which the conditions of COVID-19 have challenged progress
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVWHuJOmaEk&t=1765s>)

Decade of Action

Tourism as a SDG Activator

- UN Secretary-General “harnessing tourism’s benefits”
- UNWTO 2017 “watershed moment”
 - Recognizing 2017 International Year of Sustainable Tourism

UN Secretary-General Ban-Ki moon on World Tourism Day 2014 said “Harnessing tourism’s benefits will be critical to achieving the sustainable development goals and implementing the post-2015 development agenda”.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) declared 2017 a “watershed moment” with its official International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development which proposed “making tourism a catalyst for positive change” (UNWTO, 2017, p.i). This declaration positions tourism as an activator and driver to advance the 2030 universal 2030 SDG Agenda. This positioning has been confronted by scholars signalling that without critical engagement with the SDGs and analysis from several approaches and diverse perspectives is required.

SDGs and Tourism



SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth Target **8.9**



SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production Target **12.B**



SDG 14 Life Below Water **14.7**

The SDGs serve as an important framework for the tourism industry. This is supported by Butler (1999) who argued, the ambiguity of what is meant by sustainable tourism has led to sporadic and non-systematic monitoring of the impacts of tourism and achievement of sustainability.

Importantly, tourism has explicitly been identified as targets in Goals 8, 12 and 14. Specifically, SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth Target **8.9** By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production Target **12.B** Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. SDG 14 Life Below Water **14.7** By 2030, increase the economic benefits to Small Island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism.

The tourism sector is known to be the economic powerhouse since it exhibited some of the highest earnings from 2015 by contributing to almost 10% of the world's GDP (Tourism for SDGs, n.d.). The service sector within the tourism industry is also known to contribute around 30% of the service exports, thereby generating large amounts of jobs for people (Tourism for SDGs, n.d.).

Discussion Question

What other SDGs do you see the tourism sector directly contributing too?

Provide an example.



e.g.,
SDG 4 Quality Education
SDG 5 Gender Equality

SDGs & the Tourism Scholarship

- Initially centering SDG13, 14 and 15
- Important Collections:
 - Activating critical thinking to progress the SDGs (Boluk et al., 2019; 2021)
 - Considering the role of technology (Ali et al., 2020).
 - Deepening our understandings of the SDGs (Boluk & Rasoolimanesh, 2021)
 - Tourism, the SDGs and partnerships (Scheyvens & Cheer, 2021).

The editors of the Journal of Sustainable Tourism (Bramwell et al., 2017) in their marking of the 25 years of scholarship in the journal, initially noted a dearth of scholarly activity published in JoST on the SDGs. The editors noted insufficient attention paid to most of the SDGs. Specifically, the authors recognized SDG13 Climate Action, SDG14 Life Below Water and SDG15 Life on Land as the three areas receiving the most attention in the JoST literature (Bramwell et al., 2017, p.6). This led to their following reflection,

[...] when an international world body has identified 17 broad areas to define sustainability, and the journal dedicated to thinking about what tourism can contribute to sustainability does so through its connection predominantly in five or six of these areas, then it should give us pause to reflect upon our contribution as a community of scholars, while also encouraging thought on the value of the development path identified by global bodies (Bramwell et al., 2017, p.6). Massey University hosted the inaugural conference in New Zealand 2018. Critically and carefully considering the SDGs as a framework for actioning sustainability thinking in tourism is required and has been used as the backdrop for a few Special Issues in our field. Such thinking is crucial given the considerable attention the topic of sustainability has received in contemporary tourism scholarship, the imminent global climate emergency, and the fact we really have not

given the UN SDGs adequate reflection in the literature (e.g., Ali et al., 2020; Bramwell et al., 2017; Boluk et al., 2019; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020) which may hinder our realization of the powerful role tourism may play in progressing sustainability.

Four important Special Issues and an edited book have been published in our field encouraging engagement and dialogue on the SDGs. This organized work has drawn attention to many of the underserved SDGs in tourism.

General Critiques of SDGs

1. Division of countries based on economic status
2. Participation is voluntary
3. Institutional arrangements and partnerships are skewed to favor “the haves”.
4. Lack of initiatives to support lesser developed countries.

1.) While the framework has guidelines to ensure fair practices and the inclusion of all stakeholders- the privatization of resources across sectors does little to support countries across differing economic statuses.

2.) The nature of participation in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals is voluntary for countries, which leads to an overall imbalance in the division of labour and responsibility in working for change that affects everyone. Governance decisions that focus on improving a country's financial goals by improving income gains for the top 1% may help with the national income distribution and overall economic growth of a country but further widens the gap between the rich and the poor in the same country (Pogge & Sengupta, 2016).

3.) The institutional arrangement of partnerships across different sectors like that of between private organizations and of developed countries is skewed to favour the powerful, which has been a major flaw in the attainment of any of the SDG goals that does not revolve around the economy.

4.) The universalism of partnership efforts envisioned by the UN is lost because of this since there is a lack in initiatives to help lead and support lesser developing countries with technological capabilities for better data collection and handling, which can further help track progress (Pogge & Sengupta, 2016). The problem is that the most common solution to help poor countries with development efforts in attaining the SDGs is main through investment efforts from donor governments, foundations and corporations. This does little to provide

them with actual resources required for achieving the goals.



Reflection
Question

How might tourism leverage support, and progress sustainability interests?

Tourism Critiques

1. Indigenous peoples and women are excluded in the goals.
2. Tourism is a broad sector requiring organized coordination.
3. Emphasis on production on consumption (SDG12) may prevail over sustainability interests.

1.) Exclusion of indigenous people and women in terms of discussing tourism policies affecting them goes against the goals of inclusion. Thus, there is a need for ensuring fair partnerships across all levels of organization be it public, private, regional, national or international along with the inclusion of transparent governance with the presence of all stakeholders to help alleviate the previous problems of over-tourism and meet the respective goals.

2.) Tourism is a broad sector that requires local, governmental, and societal aspects to come together in planning and making sure new methods of sustainability are feasible in terms of implementation (Boluk, Cavaliere, & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021).

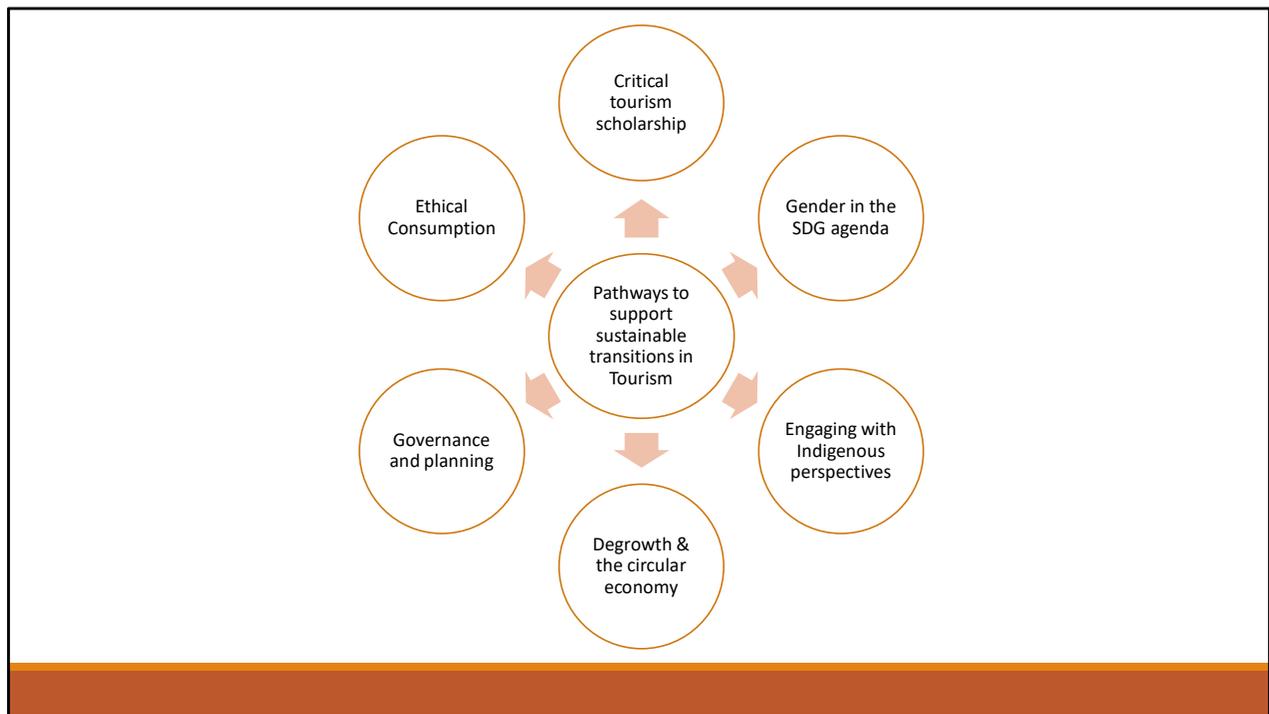
3.) Re-defining and re-building existing hierarchical structures that brought about dynamics of power focused on the monetary aspects and overlooked the environmental aspects is imperative (Boluk, Cavaliere, & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021).

Tourism Critiques (continued)

4. Pre-pandemic we had an overtourism issue disregarding SDGs.
5. A lack of partnerships decreases the level of trust and engagement with the SDGs.
6. The lack of clarity in understanding the need for and importance of adopting the SDGs.

4.) Pre-pandemic we had an overtourism issue which revealed a disregard for the SDGs.

5.) A lack of partnerships may lead to a lack of trust among countries and stakeholders.



Boluk, Cavaliere and Higgins-Desbiolles (2019; 2021) present a framework arising from mutually reformist and radical pathways to support sustainable transitions in tourism including critical tourism scholarship, gender in the sustainable development agenda, engaging with Indigenous perspectives and other paradigms, degrowth and the circular economy, governance and planning and ethical consumption.

The six themes present a conceptual framework for interrogating transformed futures in tourism.

Critical tourism scholarship provides the skill for deep critical thinking that supports open and emancipatory approaches- supported through the open-mindedness that comes from engaging with diverse viewpoints and voices from women, Indigenous peoples, and others who will underscore there are many ways of being, knowing and doing in tourism.

The final three themes the authors offer confront neoliberal capitalism as it prevents achieving the SDG agenda.

The six themes present ways to consider the problematic nature of the current practice of tourism and alternatives already present (Boluk, Cavaliere & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2019; 2021).

Key Takeaways

- The SDGs fail to recognize a few important stakeholders.
- Tourism is recognized as a sector to drive the SDGs.
- Adopting a critical lens may allow us to determine how tourism may intervene.

The United Nations blueprint encompassing 17 SDGs while at first glance may seem all-encompassing; however, fails to recognize a few crucial voices who could lend supporting in progressing the goals.

While tourism is recognized as a leading sector to support SDG progress, an emphasis on production and consumption may undermine progress.

Adopting a critical lens may allow us to determine how tourism may intervene on the pressing issues encompassed in the SDGs.

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