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Constructing sustainable tourism development: The 2030 agenda and the managerial ecology of sustainable tourism

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ABSTRACT

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets a series of sustainable development goals (SDGs) "to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all" by 2030. The Agenda influences tourism policy even though the Agenda resolution only mentions tourism three times. A "heterogeneous constructionism" approach is adopted to examine the managerial ecology of tourism and the SDGs. Managerial ecology involves the instrumental application of science and economic utilitarian approaches and in the service of resource utilisation and economic development. A managerial ecological approach is integral to UNWTO work on the SDGs, as well as other actors, and is reflected in policy recommendations for achievement of the SDGs even though tourism is less sustainable than ever with respect to resource use. This situation substantially affects capacities to do "other," and create alternative development and policy trajectories. It is concluded that a more reflexive understanding of knowledge and management is required to better understand the implications of knowledge circulation and legitimisation and action for sustainable tourism. More fundamentally, there is a need to rethink human–environment relations given the mistaken belief that the exertion of more effort and greater efficiency will alone solve problems of sustainable tourism.

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Introduction

It has become something of a truism that sustainable development is a major focus of tourism policy makers, including industry and destination marketing organisations, and of tourism researchers. In the case of the former, for example, the lead UN agency the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has sustainable development as one of the key headings on its website for what it does (together with mainstreaming tourism, ethics and social responsibility, tourism and development, competitiveness and fostering knowledge). With respect to the latter, there is a designated journal focussing on sustainable tourism, and numerous texts and journal articles, accounting for possibly as much as around five percent of journal output (Hall, Lew, & Williams, 2014). The policy significance of sustainable tourism is such that 2017 was the official UN International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. Yet despite such interest and overt attention, empirical measures suggest the tourism is actually less sustainable than ever at the global scale (Hall, 2011; Rutty, Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2015; Scott, Hall, & Gössling, 2016a, Scott,

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Gössling, Hall, & Peeters, 2016b). Concerns as to tourism's contribution to sustainable development have also become an issue at the local scale following a series of high profile negative reactions to tourism growth in destinations such as Barcelona, Iceland and Venice, which have become part of a wider industry and policy maker response to the supposed "success" of tourism, perhaps best illustrated by the high profile World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) and McKinsey & Company (2017) report on *Coping with Success: Managing Overcrowding in Tourism Destinations*.

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets a series of sustainable development goals (SDGs) "to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all" by 2030 "as part of a new sustainable development agenda." Given the emphasis of the UNWTO on sustainable tourism and the economic significance of the sector the SDGs and the associated millennium development goals (MDGs) have become focal points for the study of tourism's contribution to sustainable development and the sustainability of tourism overall (Christie & Sharma, 2008; Saarinen, Rogerson, & Manwa, 2011; Saarinen & Rogerson, 2014). This is despite the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development resolution only mentioning tourism three times – in the context of natural resource use and conservation, employment generation and the promotion of local culture and products, and the sustainable use of marine resources so as to increase the economic benefits to small island developing states and least developed countries. Nevertheless, despite some critiques of the means to achieving the goals (Ferguson, 2011; Scheyvens, Banks, & Hughes, 2016), the dominant discourse tends to reflect the approaches and themes of the UNWTO and UNDP's (2017) account of tourism's "journey" to achieving the SDGs. As the UNDP and UNDP (2017) suggest, without any irony following their review of national reporting on tourism and the SDGs, "Evidently, if tourism is not well managed, it can have a negative impact on people, the planet, prosperity and peace" (p. 31). Key factors regarded as crucial to the success of the SDG journey to 2030 include enhanced competitiveness (Ruhanen, 2007), the significance of the private/corporate sector, and improved management and use of technology in becoming more efficient in responding to environmental/economic/social problems (Herrera-Cano & Herrera-Cano, 2016; Henriques & Brilha, 2017; Imon, 2017; Koide & Akenji, 2017; Lima, Eusébio, Partidário, & García Gómez, 2012; Novelli & Hellwig, 2011), often in relation to specific local case studies (Lapeyre, 2011; Matarrita-Cascante, Brennan, & Luloff, 2010; Mbaiwa, 2011).

The nature and achievement of sustainable development can be considered in a variety of ways (Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien, 2005), including with respect to tourism (Hall, Gössling, & Scott, 2015). This therefore raises a critical question: Why then are the SDGs predominantly framed in a particular growth and business way in a tourism context that emphasise the importance of market oriented approaches and managerialism, when the SDGs are also concerned with broader social and environmental concerns as well as economic change? And, therefore, potentially other ways of framing, seeing and doing. For example, Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of the UNWTO suggests, "The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 [SDGs] sets the path that we all must embrace. … the private sector, which is the key player in tourism, … is beginning to recognise that the SDGs offer true business opportunities as sustainable business operations can spur competitiveness and increase profit" (UNWTO-UNDP, 2017, pp. 6–7). Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator, states, "The role of the private sector and access to financing are paramount to building a more sustainable tourism sector. Long-term competitiveness depends on the willingness to manage industry vulnerabilities and invest in new markets and services … " (UNWTO-UNDP, 2017, p. 9). At the Official Closing ceremony of the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development 2017 which discussed the "roadmap" for advancing the contribution of tourism towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Gloria Guevara, President and CEO, WTTC, similarly commented, "Sustainability remains the bedrock of our activity. We will continue to drive the conversation on planning for and managing tourism growth, define a sector-wide response to climate change, work on how the sector can reduce illegal trade in wildlife and contribute to inclusive job creation" (UNWTO, 2017a). In the same official UNWTO press release for the event, Talal Abu-Ghazaleh, Chairman, Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organisation in Jordan was quoted as saying, "I personally believe that the future of tourism lies in enabling ICT capacities. Accordingly, we should harness those powers for smart tourism… I believe that the way forward in our journey to 2030, is smart tourism. I call on all of you to guide me and support me in this endeavor"; while Marie-Gabrielle Ineichen-Fleisch, State Secretary Economic Affairs (SECO) of Switzerland states, "In the future, a strong international cooperation of all relevant actors involved in the tourism sector should become the driving force to promote sustainable tourism and to implement tourism policies efficiently" (UNWTO, 2017a). So, are we all meant to follow, cooperate and work with the UNWTO and UNDO focus on SDGs in order to be relevant or does relevance lie beyond official agendas and the seeming synchronicity of approaches that appear to dominate sustainable tourism discourse?

Grounded in research on natural resource management practices (Bavington, 2001, 2011; Bavington & Banoub, 2016; Jenkins, 2015; Oelschlaeger, 2014; Thornton & Hebert, 2015), this paper draws upon critiques of managerial ecology to highlight the way in which the development and implementation of the SDGs in the context of tourism, reflects the main actors "mutual coercion mutually agreed upon through the self-organising disciplinary power of the market's invisible hand" (Bavington, 2011, p. 9). Importantly, researchers themselves are often part of the system of natural resource management by which nature, as well as human activity, is valorised in terms of property, services, and private rights (Bavington, 2011). As Wynn (2011, p. xvii) suggests, "conveniently, these strategies proved entirely congruent with prevailing neoliberal economic doctrines emphasising the challenges of complexity, conflict and uncertainty in economic systems." Just as significantly, the critique of managerial ecology claims that much natural resource management could best be described as a form of "managed annihilation" (Bavington, 2001, 2011) by which natural resources decline as a result of "people too much given to framing the world as a set of problems they have the capacity to fix" (Wynn, 2011, p. xvii).

This paper provides a counter-institutional perspective on the tourism sector's approach to the SDGs and the framing of sustainable tourism. This is primarily undertaken in relation to the received view of the dominant social paradigm within tourism that defines the basic belief structures and practices of tourism marketplace actors as manifested in existing exchange structures as well as the actions of actors that serve to reinforce the paradigm within associated institutional structures. Lead international agencies, such as the UNWTO and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), together with larger corporate actors and national industry associations and destination marketing organisations are key actors in the promotion of the value of the market, growth, competition and the "management" of problems. Such a paradigm is also strongly reinforced by many universities and the academics within them. This is despite the growing contradictions between such positions and sustainability, as evidenced by increased biodiversity loss, growing concentration of economic wealth in the hands of a few, and the increasing realities of a changing climate (Rutty et al., 2015). Instead, knowledge is inherently multiple, with multiple claims to representing reality and multiple ways of knowing (Sandercock, 1998). This constructionist position is in contrast to positivist claims that examination of the facts will reveal the truth that can be rationally responded to by management practices. Accordingly, a "heterogeneous constructionism" approach is taken to the construction of the SDGs and tourism in terms of existing exchange structures. The nature of this approach is discussed first, before examining tourism and the SDGs, particularly as constructed by the UNWTO.

Heterogeneous constructionism

Sustainability is an environmental problem. But how is our notion of the environment that we respond to in personal, economic, management and policy terms constructed?

The problem of tourism and the SDGs, and sustainable tourism overall, raises questions about the significance of biophysical processes for tourism production systems, and therefore requires addressing dualistic notions about the natural world and its relationship to socio-economic processes. As Mansfield (2003) questioned, "How can we treat nature, biophysical processes, and the 'organic' as analytically significant without treating them as a mechanistic function or a materiality that is outside of social existence?" (p. 10). Taylor (1995a, 1995b, 1999) used the term "heterogeneous constructionism," to capture an emphasis on the heterogeneity of components, elements or resources drawn into the practice of knowledge making. Taylor (1995a) used the qualifier "heterogeneous" to establish some distance from standard views about social construction, which imply that scientists' accounts reflect or are determined by their social views.

Demeritt's (2001) examination of the construction of global warming and the politics of science used a heterogeneous constructionism approach to refers to the "mutual construction of nature, science, and society. Rather than taking these phenomena as given, this approach is concerned with how they are constructed through the specific and negotiated articulation of heterogeneous social actors" (Demeritt, 2001, p. 311). From this approach, the facts of nature are not given as such but emerge artefactually as the heterogeneously constructed result of contingent social practices (Demeritt, 1998, 2001). Heterogeneous constructionism is ontologically realist about entities, but epistemologically antirealist with respect to theories and how they are framed with respect to relations (Demeritt, 1998), i.e. what we designate as "carbon dioxide" has an ontologically objective existence, but our conception and classification of it are socially contingent. Heterogeneous constructionism therefore provides a way of acknowledging "that the world 'matters' without taking for granted either the particular configuration of its matter or the processes by which it may be realised for us" (2001, p. 311). As Rouse (1987) stated with respect to the physical sciences

> Practices are not representations that can be understood abstractly. They are always ways of dealing with the world. The ontological kinds they make manifest are determinable only through our purposive interactions with things of those kinds, and thereby with the other things that surround us. And those other things are as essential to the existence of meaningful ontological possibilities as our practices are … Another way to put this is that for there to be things of any particular kinds, there must be a world to which they belong. But the reality of that world is not a hypothesis to be demonstrated; it is the already given condition that makes possible any meaningful action at all, including posing and demonstrating hypotheses. (Rouse, 1987, pp. 159–60)

A heterogeneous construction approach seeks to avoid dualistic categories that treat nature either as an external realm that acts as resource for, limit to, determinant of, or backdrop to human society, or as a pure social construction with no independent reality. Instead, for the heterogeneous constructionist, nature and the environment are artifactual and their understanding an active and ontologically transformative practice. For example, the development of nature-based industries, such as the ecotourism sector, highlights that biophysical processes provide both barriers and opportunities for production systems, and as such, they play a key role in structuring some industries, especially those that are biologically based (Boyd, Prudham, & Schurman, 2001). As Castree (2005, p. 16) comments, "without knowledges of nature we can never really come to know the nature to which these knowledges refer… we use tacit and explicit knowledges to organise our engagements with those phenomenon we classify as 'natural'. There is, in short, no unmediated access to the natural world free from frameworks of understanding."

The classical empiricist approach has been extremely significant in research on tourism and the environment, and is integral to the SDGs as they seek to enable growth while simultaneously conserving nature and natural resources, but the framework it provides is often taken for granted without consideration of the "assumptions that organise and, importantly, circumscribe the field of analysis" (Castree, 2002, pp. 116–117). The clearest example of this comes with the notion of impact, a metaphor derived from the material realist ontology of classical empiricism that is widely used with respect to tourism and sustainability, including with respect to the SDGs and concepts of "overtourism." For example, the UNWTO-UNDP (2017) report notes, "Both countries and companies lack frameworks to capture, aggregate and report on the full economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism" with respect to "Improving performance by measuring impact and sharing knowledge" (p. 14). While the report defines sustainable tourism itself in relation to impacts as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts" (UNWTO-UNDP, 2017, p. 17).

The metaphor of human impacts is a major focus of sustainable tourism and "has come to frame our thinking and circumscribe debate about what constitutes explanation" (Head, 2008, p. 374). The metaphor has certain features:

1. The emphasis on *the moment(s) of collision between two separate entities* (e.g. the "impact" between tourism and the economic/social/physical environment as part of the "three pillars" of sustainability) has favoured explanations that depend on correlation in time and space (Weyl, 2009), and methodologies that are fully focussed on dating and/or particular moments in time, to the detriment of the search for mechanisms of connection and causation rather than simple correlation (Head, 2008).
2. The emphasis on the moment(s) of impact *assumes a stable natural, social or economic baseline, and an experimental method in which only one variable is changed* (Head, 2008). Such an approach is also inappropriate for understanding complex and dynamic socio-environmental systems (Hall, 2013a).
3. Third, and perhaps most profoundly influential, is the way the terms "tourism impacts" or "tourist impacts" ontologically *positions tourism and tourists as "outside" the system under analysis*, as outside of nature (or whatever it is that is being impacted) (Hall, 2013a). This is ironic given that research on global environmental change demonstrates just how deeply entangled tourism is in environmental systems (Rutty et al., 2015), yet the metaphor remains in widespread use in official documents and in tourism research.
4. Putting a significant explanatory divide between humans and nature requires the *conflation of bundles of variable processes* under such headings as "human," "climate," and "environment" (Demeritt, 2001; Head, 2007, 2008). To which we could add "tourism."
5. A further characteristic of dichotomous explanations is their *veneer of simplicity and elegance*. Yet, "the principle that preference should be given to explanations that require the fewest number of assumptions has been incorrectly conflated with the idea that simpler explanations are more likely to be true than complex ones … In fact, the view that causality is simple takes many more assumptions than the view that it is complex" (Head, 2008, p. 374).

As Demeritt (2001) was at pains to point out, his approach was not a claim that anthropogenic climate change was not real, rather that very little attention has been paid to the cultural politics of scientific practice and its consequential role in framing and, in that sense, constructing knowledge. Instead, he contended that the demand for and expectation of policy relevance on scientific research has subtly shaped the formulation of research questions, choice of methods, standards of proof, and the definition of other aspects of what constitutes "good" scientific practice. This pattern of reciprocal influence between the science and politics of climate change, Demeritt (2001, pp. 308–309) argues, "belies the categorical distinction so often made between science, based purely on objective fact, and politics, which involves value-laden decision making that is separable from and downstream of science." In a similar fashion, the argument developed here asserts that a heterogeneous constructionist interpretation, in revealing "complexity" and the entangled interaction of society-environment-technology, raises serious questions about the implications of the relationship between tourism and the SDGs being dominated by a particular economic-political discourse and the policy responses which it legitimates (Bickerstaff & Walker, 2003).

Tourism and the SDGs as managerial ecology

Managerial ecology, as expressed in environmental and resource management, involves the instrumental application of science and utilitarian economic approaches in the service of resource utilisation and economic development (Bavington & Slocombe, 2002). According to Merchant (1980, p. 238): "Managerial ecology seeks to maximise energy production, economic yields and environmental quality through ecosystem modelling, manipulation, and prediction of outcomes," and is characterised by an "unquestioned faith in management as the solution to deep seated ecological and social problems" (Bavington, 2002, p. 5). Merchant (1980) argued that the historical roots of managerial ecology lay in reductionist utilitarian approaches to the human–nature relationship, while Zwier and Blok (2017) see the Anthropocene concept as an outcome of managerial ecology thinking. Nevertheless, while complexity science focuses on uncertainty and there being limits on predictability and control, what Sardar and Ravetz (1994) described as resulting in the demolition of "the notion of control and certainty in science," there has not been "a wholesale rejection of the idea of management, rather it has resulted in redefinition, redeployment and relocation of management, managers and the managed" (Bavington, 2002, p. 7).

Management is significant in its perceived capacity to solve complex problems, such as those tackled by the SDGs, because it seeks to eliminate indeterminism and emphasises the role of science and technology in addressing crises (Alvesson & Willmott, 2012). In contrast, more recent developments in socio-ecological thinking have highlighted not only the multi-scale dynamic complexity of sustainability issues but also the way in which policy-making is influenced by values and the political ecology of decisions. However, the consequences of complexity from a managerial ecology framework depend on perspective. If complexity is seen from an ontological perspective as an inherent characteristic of nature then this clearly suggests that there must be limits to control and, instead, adaptive and coping strategies are required. In contrast, if complexity is regarded as an epistemological problem, then complexity is not an inherent "fact," but instead an outcome of perspective, level of knowledge and the tools that are used for analysis (Bavington, 2010). For example, even though the UNWTO and UNDP (2017) acknowledge that tourism value chains are characterised by their "immense size and complexity" (p. 44), they go on to argue, "*Effective management requires consistent measurement of impact*: While the tourism private sector can contribute to all 17 SDGs – in particular to SDGs 12, 13, 1, 4 and 8 on 'Responsible Consumption and Production', 'Climate Action', 'No Poverty', 'Quality Education', and 'Decent Work and Economic Growth', respectively – its impact is still difficult to measure given that there is no universal means by which travel and tourism businesses and destinations can measure and monitor their progress or contribution towards the SDGs" (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017, p. 56). Nevertheless, measurement, surveillance, control, and regulation lie at the core of managerialist values developed in an economic and philosophical context where process is subordinated to output (and profit) (Lynch, 2014).

Another reason for the maintenance of managerialist positions is that the notion of complexity may be recognised as relevant at some scales or situations and not in others. Complexity, for example, may be recognised as occurring in large scale environmental systems but not in the behaviours of individual communities, policy actors or people, which from a managerial ecology perspective may continue to be framed from neo-classical economic perspectives as rational actors (Bavington, 2011). This becomes especially significant given the emphasis on the role of the private sector and market solutions in the SDGs. For example, in SDG 9 "Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation," the UNWTO and UNDP (2017, p. 27) emphasise suggested relationships between technology, sustainability, and the market stating that "The rise in innovation and new technologies has changed the tourism business model, benefitting nations through efficiency gain, enhanced customer engagement and knowledge transfer. By embracing new technologies, countries can create market awareness, provide location-based services and enrich travel experience." Such statements are remarkable for the lack of analysis behind them as to what, for example, "efficiency gains" and technologically driven business models may mean for changes in tourism employment, especially the use of zero-hour and part-time contracts, or how the actions of large disruptive informal sector companies such as Airbnb and Uber affect housing and transport services (Corporate Europe Observatory, 2018; Mann, 2018; McCurry, 2018; Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2017). Indeed, sustainability itself is strongly positioned as an economic or competitive value rather than an ethical or environmental one: "many companies already seem to acknowledge that their contribution [to the SDGs] should be integrated into core business and form an inherent part of the creation of value to succeed on today's markets" (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017, p. 41).

A key issue of the UNWTO and UNDP (2017) analysis of the SDGs is the extent to which tourism's relationship to the SDGs is treated as a social problem. For example, that in regard to the 2030 Agenda's five key themes – people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships – it is suggested that tourism is mostly contributing to issues that relate to "prosperity" and "planet" (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017, pp. 30–31). Although there is attention to the economic returns from tourism there is little focus on the distribution of income and economic capital, i.e. who benefits? Similarly, attention to climate change and marine and coastal issues is primarily invoked as a physical change, rather than in terms of the social and economic injustices that give rise to the socio-economic and environmental issues that the SDGs try and address. However, it has long been recognised that designing interventions and policies without considering the role of existing institutions or societal responses will likely lead to policy failure (Taylor 1997a, 1997b), yet this continues to be done. As Taylor (1997a, p. 172) suggested with respect to poverty issues, that resonate strongly with tourism's supposed role in poverty reduction and SDG 1 (End poverty in all its forms everywhere) in particular, "Acknowledging the statistics of inequality does not, however, constitute an analysis of the dynamics of inequality. In the absence of serious intellectual work – conceptual and empirical – heartfelt caveats about the rich and the poor do not substantially alter the politics woven into this research."

In the same way discussion regarding the supposed benefits of tourism to reduce poverty is limited in policy terms. The UNWTO and UNDP (2017, p. 16) state that the tourism public policy focus of SDG 1 is "Tourism provides income through job creation at local and community levels. It can be linked with national poverty reduction strategies and entrepreneurship. Low skills requirement and local recruitment can empower less favoured groups, particularly youth and women." The option of a more progressive tax system is not raised and neither are issue of the tax avoidance and minimisation strategies of many large corporations with significant interests in travel and tourism (Bryan, Rafferty, & Wigan, 2017; Schneider, 2018). This is perhaps all the more surprising given that "tax income from tourism" is explicitly identified by the UNWTO and UNDP (2017, p. 16) as a means of investing in health care services, although it is possible that they differentiate between taxes on tourists (in some circumstances) versus taxes on tourism companies. The UNWTO has previously come out publicly in opposition to proposals to tax tourism, including in Africa (UNWTO, 2014) with then UNWTO Secretary-General, Taleb Rifai, arguing, "A tourism tax in Africa is a threat to the competitiveness of the region and to all African economies which increasingly have tourism as a key pillar to their development." Indeed, the press release stated, that taxation is "one of the main obstacles to the sustainable development of tourism and aviation in the region" (UNWTO, 2014).

The example of taxation highlights the tensions that exist with respect to how the relationship between sustainable development and tourism is understood. While the UNWTO emphasise the sustainable development of tourism, the SDGs are about the contribution of tourism to a broader notion of sustainable development. These are related but they are certainly not the same thing. For example, potential CSR actions for companies identified by UNWTO and UNDP (2017) for the SDGs focus on market-oriented actions, i.e. purchasing strategies, improved human resource management, efficiency improvements and donations. There is little in the form of state intervention in terms of greater regulation of the sector or direct charging for environmental subsidies that are currently borne by residents. Instead, the UNWTO and UNDP (2017) focus on the development of partnerships to finance sustainable tourism initiatives, suggesting that "public–private and multi-stakeholder partnerships can strengthen private sector engagement and galvanise the support needed to achieve the SDGs" (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017, p. 13).

Public–private partnerships are "working arrangements based on a mutual commitment (over and above that implied in any contract) between a public sector organisation with any other organisation outside the public sector" (Bouvaird, 2004, p. 200). Austerity measures, funding uncertainty and changes in philosophies of governance have led to greater use of private sector organisations for public service delivery, including tourism (Hall, 2014), to improve governance, broaden donor networks, and/or increase income streams. Although public–private partnerships have long been criticised in a tourism context for their capacities to exclude local stakeholders (Hall, 1999), they remain a favoured governmental strategy for tourism development, despite concerns over equity, cost-effectiveness and long-term liability (Frost & Laing, 2018). In particular, although they remain criticised for: (a) the problematic ways in which "communities," "partnership" and "stakeholders" are defined, delineated and constructed; (b) the lack of alignment and integration with local and national development planning policies and processes; (c) top-down governance, and the absence or erosion of participatory processes and empowerment goals; and (d) the tendency towards highly conservative development visions (McEwan, Mawdsley, Banks, & Scheyvens, 2017), they remain a legitimisation strategy of international agencies and government for market oriented policies (Bäckstrand & Kylsäter, 2014). Indeed, such issues reflect broader debates surrounding the way tourism is used for development, and discussions on the value of pro-poor tourism and more inclusive forms of tourism.

Notions of inclusive tourism, for example, are usually framed as part of CSR strategies and activities. Zapata Campos, Hall, and Backlund (2018) suggest that the incorporation of inclusive tourism concerns within the CSR agenda-setting process is primarily a response to customer concerns, the activities of NGOs, and/or because of negative publicity as these may affect brand reputation and consumer behaviour. They conclude that sustainability policies and standards, can be loosely coupled, or decoupled, from internal practices, and have the potential to trigger further engagement with CSR and some aspects of inclusive tourism, by stimulating both intra- and inter-firm learning through collaborative processes among competitors. However, they argue that such measures cannot lead to profound changes in the sustainability practices of the mass tourism industry if the area is underinstitutionalised. Instead, they stress that sustainability standards compliance is improved in countries with strong labour and other forms of regulation (Toffel, Short, & Ouellet, 2015):

> Powerful players in the industry, such as large tour operators, have the ability to enable greater sustainability and more inclusive forms of tourism. But if more coercive institutional pressures, in the form of laws, regulations and incentives, are not enacted to accelerate this process, it risks perpetuating a limited adoption of inclusive practices in the mass tourism industry (Zapata Campos et al., 2018, p. 16).

Instead, the ongoing message of international tourism bodies in relation to tourism and sustainable development is that continued focus on improved competitiveness, efficiency, the market and growth is the answer, even though it must be done "better" (Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of the UNWTO, in UNWTO, 2018).

> Tourism's sustained growth brings immense opportunities for economic welfare and development', said the UNWTO Secretary-General, while warning at the same time that it also brings in many challenges. 'Adapting to the challenges of safety and security, constant market changes, digitalization and the limits of our natural resources should be priorities in our common action' … The UNWTO Secretary-General stressed education and job creation, innovation and technology, safety and security; and sustainability and climate change as the priorities for the sector to consolidate its contribution to sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda, against the backdrop of its expansion in all world regions and the socio-economic impact this entails. To address these issues, Mr. Pololikashvili concluded that 'public/private cooperation as well as

> public/public coordination must be strengthened, in order to translate tourism growth into more investment, more jobs and better livelihoods (UNWTO, 2018).

Similarly, the previous UNWTO Secretary-General, Taleb Rifai, stated with respect to the tourism and the SDGs: "As the world comes together to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the exponential growth of our sector provides tremendous hope that our sector will remain one that has a truly positive change in the world. It should inspire us all to act, together, to make this world a better place" (in UNWTO, 2017b, p. 5). The remarkable thing with these comments is that even though Rifai emphasises the significance of growth in introducing the relationship between tourism and the SDGs: "2016 was a momentous year for tourism. International tourist arrivals continued their upward trajectory in their seventh straight year of above-average growth despite many challenges, reaching 1.2 billion. A comparable sequence of uninterrupted solid growth has not been recorded since the 1960s" (in UNWTO, 2017b, p. 5). There is no recognition that despite such growth tourism's contribution to development goals is extremely uneven, while also contributing to environmental change, including climate change (Rutty et al., 2015). This would suggest that tourism growth by itself is insufficient to achieve many of the SDGs, instead attention needs to be paid to the social, economic and political processes behind development, rather than just the greater marketisation and financialisation of tourism development, assets and services that the UNWTO advocates.

Managerial ecology and the neoliberalisation of sustainable tourism and the SDGs

The discussion above highlights that the managerial ecology of the main tourism bodies to the SDGs is profoundly neoliberal in emphasis. Shaping both the relationship of the individual to the environment as well as its management and, it can be argued, how research should be framed. Neoliberalism is premised on the assumption that the citizen's relationship to the state and others is mediated via the market (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberal managerialism, also referred to as new managerialism (Clarke, Gewritz, & McLaughlin, 2000; Lynch, 2014), involves governing through enacting and institutionalising technical changes imbued with market values. In the case of the UNWTO, there has been a profound shift towards market values over time while retaining the guise of sustainability. This, of course, also reflects shifts elsewhere in governmentality, but critically it has not made tourism any more sustainable, indeed, as noted at the beginning of this paper, tourism has become less sustainable in absolute terms by most empirical measures. The focus on greater efficiency in tourism, in terms of per tourist consumption, for example, makes little difference to the overall absolute sustainability of tourism and the achievement of the environmental goals of the SDGs if growth in visitor numbers, their total consumption, and the rebound effects from interventions outweighs greater material efficiency per tourist.

Language defines the world. This is more than issues of defining what constitutes sustainable tourism, as significant as that might be, it also structures how we are to understand tourism and its relationship to the SDGs. Neoliberal approaches, such as those portrayed in the UNWTOs approach to the SDGs, are often presented as apolitical, while at the same time neoliberalism is the dominant political, economic and social imaginary of contemporary society (Hursh, Henderson, & Greenwood, 2015), understood as "a way of thinking shared in a society by ordinary people, the common understandings that make everyday practices possible, giving them sense and legitimacy" (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 34). Although there are varieties of neoliberalism, there is clearly enough commonality between them to observe that the UNWTO and UNDP (2017) report and associated UNWTO activities in relation to the SDGs are serving to re-embed sustainable tourism in different political, legal, and cultural arrangements that privilege business and corporate interests and the financialisation and marketisation of sustainable development. As an agency of corporate interest, the activities of the WTTC that promote such a position is perhaps understandable. In contrast, the UNWTO is meant to have a wider mandate. The UNWTO and UNDP (2017) nevertheless reinforce the notion that the private sector and competitive markets should have greater responsibility in the provision of tourism infrastructure and services and, as such, act to further reinforce the commodification of the environment by tourism (Büscher, Dressler, & Fletcher, 2014). Indeed, Dauvergne and Lister (2013, p. 25) suggest: "Turning sustainability into eco-business… is altering the nature of environmentalism, increasing its power to accelerate some forms of change, but limiting what is on the table to question, challenge, and alter. Sustainability as an idea can be radical: not just calling for changes in the rules of the game (i.e. market dynamics), but also to the game itself (i.e. the global economy)." Furthermore, adoption of the language of resilience, especially in relation to SDG13 "climate action" to further justify certain forms of sustainable development act as a form of "neoliberal environmentalism addresses the depletion of ecosystems as a global security problem, the only solution to which is the securitisation and financialization of the biosphere" (Walker & Cooper, 2011, p. 155). Indeed, the overall sense of crisis engendered by the SDGs, sustainable tourism and, the more recent, overtourism, only appear to encourage the UNWTO and the WTTC to advocate "more of the same" neoliberal strategies, even though they are not working.

Discussion and conclusions: What hope?

> Above all, however, tourism is a sector of hope. With its manifold socio-economic benefits and broad influence on a diverse range of sectors, tourism is a valuable part of global solutions to these global challenges and can be even more so. With more than 1.2 billion international tourists today and 1.8 billion predicted by 2030, the sector keeps on providing opportunities for each traveller and everyone involved in tourism to contribute to a more responsible, sustainable and inclusive future for all (UNWTO Secretary-General, Taleb Rifai, in UNWTO, 2017b, p. 5).

The framing of the SDGs through the undifferentiated appeal of sustainable development talks to a sense of global citizenship. Such appeals are not necessarily illegitimate, particularly in areas such as human rights, but it does "steer attention away from the difficult politics that result from differentiated social groups having different interests in causing and alleviating" economic, environmental and social problems (Demeritt, 2001, p. 313), which the SDGs are ostensibly seeking to address. The approach, shared in much of the research on sustainable tourism, serves to "tune out" positions that are not in keeping with neoliberal management ecology, such as those challenging certain assumptions surrounding problem framing and the relative roles of the market, corporations and the state (Hall, 2011).

Knowledge, and the representation of knowledge in relation to the UNWTO's official position on the SDGs and the roadmap for sustainable development to 2030, is not politically neutral and reflects a particular approach to issues of sustainability and sustainable tourism. As Evans and Marvin (2006) observe from their research on sustainable cities, knowledges are not additive and so reducing them to a *lingua franca*, in this case market-oriented neoliberal managerialism (Knafo, Dutta, Lane, & Wyn-Jones, 2018; Lawrence, 2017; Peck, 2010), will not of itself enable a resolution to that engagement. Instead, to be effective, agreement may need to be generated between actors whose knowledge of an issue is rooted in very different experiences. Indeed, some resource managers have recognised the potential value of communitarian strategies that seek to embrace Local Ecological Knowledge, empowering local people, and sought to reduce socio-economic inequities that have resulted from previous management regimes. However, "much discussed, it has not been widely implemented" (Wynn, 2011, p. xvi). Nevertheless, such an approach does not fundamentally question the "need for, or the usefulness of, management" (Bavington, 2011, p. 10) while stressing the importance of "achieving 'buy-in' from resource users to achieve consensus, avoid conflict, and permit ongoing economic growth" (2011, p. 107). Engaging different knowledges is therefore fundamentally different to engaging different voices. To explore this, Rydin (2007) suggests that it is helpful to recast knowledge as knowledge claims, i.e. a claim to understanding certain causal relationships. Such a situation is extremely important with respect to the sustainability – tourism relationship, because the UNWTO response both implicitly and explicitly presents knowledge claims by which tourism is expected to become "a more sustainable tourism sector by aligning policies, business operations and investments with the SDGs" (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017, p. 12).

Several reasons may exist for the relative lack of critical assessment of tourism's role in the SDGs. First, perhaps many researchers actually believe the stance taken by the UNWTO and others or, at least, do not actually care, with sustainability not actually being a significant interest of tourism researchers. If this were the case, then the epistemic community of tourism is dominated by neoliberal market orientations in which sustainability is more often than not framed by market and private sector oriented solutions in which individuals are "responsible *and* rational, moral yet calculating" (Bavington, 2011, p. 10; see also Reade, et al., 2017) in their agency. However, as discussed elsewhere in relation to the realities of individual capabilities to be sustainable (Whitmarsh, Seyfang, & O'Neill, 2011), there are substantial differences in the governmental and decision-making assumptions surrounding approaches that stress the sovereignty of individual agency versus those that regard people as holistic elements of larger systems (Hall, 2016). Second, research may be subject to "policy-palatability" (Buttel & Taylor, 1992) in which research and publications seek to accommodate the dominance of neo-liberal economics and managerial thinking. Third, policy makers may not only reject the results of research from outside of their paradigmatic thinking, they may also not fund such research (Shove, 2010). Policymakers, along with policy partnerships, legitimise lines of enquiry that generate results that can be accepted and managed, even if they do not necessarily provide the "solution" to policy problems. The result is a self-fulfilling cycle of credibility (Latour & Woolgar, 1986) in which evidence of the relevance and value of knowledge and research method to policymakers helps in securing additional resources for that approach (Hall, 2013b). Fully understanding the role that knowledge plays in expropriation requires expanding the focus of analysis to include not just the application of research, but also its production and circulation. Indeed, it is notable that the UNWTO and UNDP (2017) report on tourism and the SDGs contains reference to only three academic publications (and three BSc/masters theses), although it did receive some academic peer review. Instead, the vast majority of references are from institutional and industry sources. Similarly, the endnotes of the high profile report on tourism and overcrowding by WTTC and McKinsey and Company (2017) contained no academic sources, although some were used in the text for definitions and three academics were acknowledged for their "contributions." This is not to denigrate such contributions but rather to demonstrate the highly restricted nature of what is incorporated in such works, especially when there is a very long-standing literature on the overcrowding and carrying capacity issues in tourism (e.g. Ovington, Groves, Stevens, & Tanton, 1974; Skinner, 1968). Indeed, the conclusion to the foreword of the WTTC and McKinsey and Company (2017, p. 5) report:

> This work is only the beginning; the research is a starting point for ongoing conversations. To solve this challenge, leaders must be willing to identify and address the barriers (including beliefs, norms, and structures) that are holding us back from effectively managing overcrowding. And they must look for ways to compromise: when overcrowding goes too far, the repercussions are difficult to reverse.

Only serves to reinforce the neoliberal managerial stance that frames such complex problems in terms of management solutions and individual agency.

Haraway (1991) claims that knowledge (science) is about "interpretation, translation, stuttering and the partly understood. Translation is always interpretive, critical and partial. Here is a ground for conversation, rationality, and objectivity—which is power-sensitive, not pluralist, 'conversation'" (1991, p. 195). This stands in stark contrast to the approaches of lead tourism agencies to the SDGs in which the complexity of socio-ecological systems is regarded as manageable, through neoliberal means, and measurable, and therefore available for use. However, if tourism along with socio-ecological systems are genuinely regarded as (irreducibly) complex, and therefore uncertain, then this position cannot hold (Taylor, 2005). Instead, greater recognition needs to be given to constraints, including the effects of growth, as well as ethics. Bavington (2011), among others (Oelschlaeger, 2014), suggests the need for a fundamental rethink of human–environment relations so that the dominant notion of natural resource stewardship of the last 150 years moves away from the drive to manage and control nature to one that commits "to living within the limits of the ecosystems of which we are a part" (Wynn, 2011, p. xvii). Such a position is particularly apt given that this reinforces the need to treat sustainable development as a qualitative measure as opposed to a metric of growth. However, to change such thinking is extremely difficult given the dominance of neoliberal perspectives on governance and management ecology, and its self-fulfilling cycle of credibility as noted above. To achieve "third order" change the norms of governance structures require a substantial shift. As Hall (2011) argued, too much attention is given to the assumption that an institution is "good" because it facilitates partnership and network development rather than focus on norms and institutionalisation as first and necessary steps in the assessment of what institutional arrangements are promoting and their outcomes. This has resulted in enabling certain types of responses to global environmental problems consistent with this situation, "such as possibilities for the privatisation of environmental governance in some areas or the increasing use of market mechanisms. But at the same time it has made trade-offs much more difficult because it denies that they may be necessary among values of efficiency, economic growth, corporate freedom, and environmental protection" (Bernstein, 2002, p. 14). In such a context, research on the policy contradictions and failures resulting from current approaches may open up the possibilities of informing paradigm change and new ways of policy learning (Hall, 2011).

Initiatives such as the SDGs fail because they do not confront the way in which neoliberal rationalities are embedded in many tourism policy practices. The managerial approach advocated by the UNWTO and others is rooted in the political and economic context of capitalistic resource extraction by which success means failure, i.e. continued growth in tourism leads to grossly uneven development. Destination and resource managers, mediated by state agencies, corporate interests and economic rationality, may "manage" resources into oblivion (Bavington, 2011; Wynn, 2011). In some ways this could be construed as "Brundtland-as-usual" in the sense that Brundtland's ambiguity allowed business and policy-makers to promote sustainable development by using Brundtland's support for rapid growth to justify the phrase "sustainable growth" (Hopwood et al., 2005) or, in the case of the UNWTO and others, "sustainable tourism." However, it is possible, if not likely, that given the hegemonic position of neoliberal discourse neither much of the tourism industry, especially its international leadership, nor many tourism academics, can see other (Or, if they do, then they are not saying or writing). Instead, there is a need to encourage greater embrace of post-normal science and governmentalities in order to respond to the world for the complex place that it is. Embedded in such an approach is recognition that tourism policy work and research are inherently political when dealing with the uneven distribution of economic capital and social and environmental justice as well as a need to incorporate not just a range of voices in tourism policy making for the SDGs but a greater range of knowledge(s). To do so requires ontological shifts as well as more practical turns with respect to knowledge generation and transfer processes and increased pressure from researchers, NGOs and other interested parties to highlight policy failure and hold policy-makers responsible. Indeed, there may be benefits in greater research on the practices of prefigurative politics, i.e. those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal of a movement (Boggs, 1977). What otherwise may be framed as being the change you want to see (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006).

Responding to complexity, relationality and uncertainty in the policy environment requires skills of adaptation and coping as well as new knowledge transfer skills. Things become what they are through interaction with other things—through translation. One strategy from planning is to develop an "epistemology of multiplicity" (Sandercock, 1998, p. 76) that include different ways of knowing: through dialogue; from experience; from local knowledge; by learning to read symbolic and non-verbal evidence; and through contemplative or appreciative knowledge, as well as more traditional means of acquiring scientific knowledge. Associated with such post-positivist thinking is the insight that knowledge is not just the domain of the expert, whether a scientist or policy maker, but rather is associated with a variety of actors and knowledges in a variety of social locations (Bavington, 2011; Rydin, 2007). This means that notions of collaboration need to extend well beyond the narrowly envisaged public-private partnerships that are emphasised by the UNWTO and UNDP in their assessments of tourism's contribution to the SDGs.

Demystifying managerial ecology, tourism knowledge and policy making and "demonstrating the social relations its construction involves does not necessarily imply disbelief in either that knowledge or the phenomena it represents" (Demeritt 2001, p. 310). As Demeritt went on to note, "Given its vital role in helping to make sense of environmental problems such as climate change, there simply can be no question of doing without science. Rather, the challenge is how to understand and live with it better" (2001, p. 310). As part of this process the holy grail of manageability espoused by the UNWTO and others, the belief that all problems can be solved by exerting greater effort and demanding greater efficiency within the status quo of continued tourism growth and consumption, necessitates challenge. Indeed, the fundamental challenge the SDGs and their tourism advocates face if they really want tourism to be a "sector of hope" is shifting from a growth mentality to one that explicitly commits humanity to prospering and travelling within the limits of the ecosystems of which we are a part.

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