A Future of Tourism Industry: Conscious Travel, Destination Recovery And Regenerative Tourism

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Abstract: The tourism industry is a complex network of millions of suppliers and consumers who trade experiences and services. The traditional tourism model revolves around increasing the number of visitors to ensure economic return. The conventional tourism models often ignore the real cost of the travel industry's health and the cost per tourist. Covid-19 has shown us the extent to which the travel industry can be affected. The tourism and hospitality industries is the worst affected industries globally and the continuous waves of the virus, and new variants, are forcing governments to impose strict lockdowns. Misinformation and disinformation are making it harder for governments to implement strategies to contain the virus. This paper argues that the world needs a positive psychology movement to ensure a deeper understanding of the tourism industry and its impacts on destinations and hosts, both in the short-term and the long-term. The decisions made regarding destination development and the tourists need to be mindful to reduce tourism's adverse effects. Conscious travel habits and positive psychology can be seen in the emerging concept of regenerative tourism. The idea has some challenges, but it offers a holistic approach to make destinations more adaptable, creative and resilient, and ensures improved wellbeing and improves conscious level. Simultaneously, the concept provides a foundation to mindful decisions made by travellers which creates awareness about how, when and where to travel. Three scenarios are discussed based on the human conscious levels advocated by Sigmund Freud's iceberg analogy and Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Keywords: tourism recovery, conscious travel, regenerative tourism, destination recovery.

Author profile

Asif Hussain, PhD, is the founding director of Sustainability and Resilience Institute New Zealand. He specialised in tourism and infrastructure development, focusing on the consequences of infrastructure development on sustainability and resilience. Asif is a dedicated entrepreneur, social worker, philanthropist, and has developed innovative solutions and facilitated numerous community projects that have led to life-changing outcomes. He demonstrated history of working in the higher education industry, sustainable development and resilience.

Introduction

The crisis of Covid-19 has raised questions and concerns about the future of the tourism industry as a result of strict mobility regulations and new rules such as social distancing. The world is in some form of restrictions, and it is time to make some radical decisions to avoid the breakdown of the tourism industry. The question is, how? For over three decades, international development agencies have been advocating sustainability as an avenue to cope with and mitigate the impacts of changing trends and shocks. The severity and the economic and social implications of the global pandemic were not on their radar as we experience today (World Economic Forum, 2020). Despite technological advancements, we are unable to contain Covid-19, and the only useful measures are centuries-old non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) such as isolation and social distancing (Baldwin & Mauro, 2020).

Improvement in means of global mobility can be blamed for spreading the virus worldwide (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020; Lapointe, 2020). If there had been no movement of people from one part of the world to the other, the virus could have been contained. Although vaccine development has experienced impressive progress, there are significant logistic constraints in its decimation (World Health Organization, 2020). Lack of trust of people on governments worldwide is a significant factor (Gilmore, 2020) that will play a vital role in the coming months and years. While most international borders remained closed, people 'entertain' themselves within their country. In the off-season, the domestic tourism boom in New Zealand is a typical example (TVNZ, 2020).

Tourism transformation

Under a global pandemic, it isn't easy to anticipate the future of tourism. However, the study of global trends shows that tourism is transforming more rapidly than we thought. Tourism must lead the global shift towards a real responsible world – sustainable production and consumption of tourism. New Zealand government is officially focussing on high-end premium international tourists (Tourism New Zealand, 2020). Therefore, various means are being implemented to discourage low-end tourism. It is important to note that, although Covid-19 triggered the decision, the negative impacts of tourism were acknowledged early on (Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, 2019; Pollock, 2015, 2019a, 2019b).

Technological advancements have improved global connectivity and visibility of destinations (Hussain, 2019), and tourism has become an extractive economy which sells an experience (Pollock, 2019b). The fight for online visibility and competition to sell packages has been the significant factor in attracting and turning a place into a 'must-visit destination'. In this context, residents of the said place have no authority in controlling the imagery of the place they call home. Once visitors start coming, others follow (Hussain, 2019). Early adopters in a destination diversify and start tourism enterprises while others resist and alienate themselves from the tourism industry.

The global tourism disruption has arrived at our doorstep uninvitedly, and this is a test for tourism industry resilience. The tourism industry was not ready for a worldwide cataclysm of movements at such scale. The question is, what is the future of the tourism industry? In this paper, three possible scenarios are discussed to highlight the possible options for tourism recovery. They are: back to normal, a new normal or a holistic normal.

Scenario One: Back to normal

The world before Covid-19 has had many issues and concerns such as environmental

distress (Staupe-Delgado, Kruke, Ross, & Glantz, 2018), economic instability (Berg, Ostry, Tsangarides, & Yakhshilikov, 2018; Schiller, 2015), socio-political unrest (Houle, 2019), and over-tourism (Pollock, 2019a, 2019b). Humanity has been extracting resources which resulted in numerous negative externalities. Tourism, which acted as a benefactor of improved livelihood, became a burden on the natural environment, resulting in socio-cultural changes (Epler Wood, Milstein, & Ahamed-Broadhurst, 2019). Tourists needed to travel to a destination and transport infrastructure played a crucial role. Before covid, air travel was expected to double every 15 years until 2035 at a growth rate of between 4% and 5% a year (BBC, 2019).

Mass-tourism remained a significant challenge for destination development and management, and the tourism costs kept rising globally (Epler Wood et al., 2019). Tourism is an extractive and secondary economy which depends on limited resources. The tourism industry has virtually no barrier to entry which competes on the product's cost, and the return diminishes because of competition and seasonality factor (Pollock, 2019a). Each tourist's actual cost is yet to be known as destination health's economic measure focuses on an incomplete set of indicators (Epler Wood et al., 2019). While tourism continues to grow globally, the policies to address its social, economic and environmental impacts, continue to lag. According to the World Tourism Organization and United Nations Environment Programme report, only 11% of the governments have implemented sustainable tourism measures in their National Tourism Administrations (NRA) (UNWTO-UN Environment, 2019).

Despite the acknowledgement of Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) at the international levels, tourism's hidden costs are not fully acknowledged in developing tourism products, management, and consumption. The movement for better tourism was already underway before Covid-19. High profile movements on climate change at the global level (such as Greta Thunberg) have helped create awareness about climate change. The Swedish concept 'flygskam' (flight shame) is spreading and gaining popularity to minimise aeroplanes' greenhouse gasses. According to a survey, one in five participants (21%) had cut their flights last year because of climate change (BBC, 2019). This will have a significant impact on international long-haul tourism destinations in the long-run. The question remains whether post-covid concerns be put pushed and the unsustainable paths of traditional tourism restored as soon as the pandemic is under control.

Scenario Two: A new normal

There has been a significant decrease in human movement worldwide (UNWTO, 2020a, 2020b). Today, we live in a world where uncertainty is the only certainty, and travel confidence has diminished during the pandemic. In a live poll conducted by the University of South Florida, between 40% and 60% (out of 5000 plus participants) affirmed travel confidence has decreased (Cobanoglu, 2020). Similar results were found in a survey conducted by the American Travel Confidence Index which showed that only two out of three people were optimistic about travelling between July and November 2020 (Cobanoglu, 2020). According to Skift Research (2020), global travel index was 44% at the time of writing this paper, compared to over 90% pre-covid or under normal conditions.

The main reason for the decrease in travel confidence is that people do not feel safe to travel. Tourism and hospitality industries have been innovative in winning people's confidence. In this regard, innovative investment in hospitality and tourism sector has become a crucial factor in giving people

relevant information and multiple options to decide and motivate them to travel. Travel companies that promote destinations with packages are now providing relevant information about safe travel and precautionary measures related to Covid-19. For instance, airline companies show air condition systems and air filtrations' effectiveness (Norwegian Airlines, 2020). Customers are being offered contactless booking, contactless check-in's, self-service, digital boarding card, social distancing, and enhanced cleaning onboard (Norvegian, 2020). Some other services include rapid on-site Covid-19 tests conducted by airlines such as Emirates and United Airlines (Emirates Airlines, 2020; United Airlines, 2020). Also, thermal cameras are being used to detect people temperature in airports and destinations (Schulz, 2020).

Similarly, the event industry offers an option of hybrid meetings, where some people are in a venue, and the rest of the participants are online. Besides, examples of experience economy such as augmented and virtual reality tours, robot (e.g. Kiwibot) delivery, drone delivery and robotic kitchen are being experimented to provide contactless options (Cobanoglu, 2020). These steps are taken to market contactless and remote economy and promote social distancing in the hospitality sector to increase travel confidence and motivate people to travel. In the past, cleanliness was discreet, but now it has become part of the marketing strategy (Cobanoglu, 2020). These actions are fear-driven, which also have repercussions on mental health (Kreienkamp, Agostini, Krause, & Leander, 2020).

This paper argues that this current status so-called new normal is a transitionary phase, and we are moving to a holistic normal. Despite colossal focus and investment at national and international levels, the new way of living is neither sustainable nor resilient. One way or the other we will get out of this current situation as noted by Fusté-Forné and Hussain (2021) in an attempt to understand pandemic crisis management in the restaurant industry. Do we want to go back to the usual way of living that we were used to, or a new and holistic state of living that ensures long-term sustainability and resilience? The next scenario highlights the holistic normal proposed for hospitality and tourism recovery.

Scenario Three: A holistic normal

According to the Association for Psychologial Science (2020), Covid-19 has raised awareness among the masses about the social and psychological factors that influence and help us understand the impacts of Covid-19. The psychological implications of Covid-19 are vast and vary across cultures and contexts (Kreienkamp et al., 2020). These impacts are determined by individual and communities psychological and sociological development, respectively. According to Freud (1920), human psychology grows and evolves at certain levels of consciousness that determine the individual and community level of development. Freud (1920) explained the human mind is categorised as conscious, preconscious and unconscious. He described the level of human consciousness (conscious mind) as the mental processes we are aware of, using an iceberg analogy. The preconscious mind can be brought into conscious whereas the unconscious mind is inaccessible but influences judgements, feelings, and behaviours (Wilson, 2004). Based on the level of consciousness, both wants, needs and actions are formed.

As discussed above, in a tourism context, we have witnessed alarming negative externalities of tourism. Responses have differed based on individuals, communities and organisations level of consciousness. The movement of conscious travel rose even before Covid-19 pandemic (Epler

Wood et al., 2019; Pollock, 2019a, 2019b). Motivation in decision making, attitude and personal satisfaction are the central themes linked to personal growth directly coupled to individual travel decisions. This is why various tourism niches emerged such as ecotourism, green tourism, responsible tourism, and slow tourism. Whether the decision is based on self-actualisation in terms of human need, as noted by Maslow (McLeod, 2007), or maybe on a diversity of motives (Pearce & Packer, 2013). Maslow's five levels of hierarchy can be seen as a motivational factor and play a vital role in determining travel motivation (Hsu & Huang, 2008; Pearce, 2011). Mass tourism's aftermath resulted in individually conscious travel habits and positive psychology (Pollock, 2019a, 2019b). This notion has resulted in many publications that recommend a holistic approach beyond sustainability (Epler Wood et al., 2019; Pollock, 2015, 2019b). The emerging concept which claims a holistic tourism approach is termed regenerative tourism.

According to Hutchins and Storm (2019) 'regenerative' means "creating the conditions for life to continuously renew itself, to transcend into new forms, and to flourish amid ever-changing life-conditions". Owen (2007a, 2007b) used the term 'regenerative' for the first time in a tourism context. The concept of regenerative tourism works in the same principle where conditions are provided for the industry to reborn and continuously renew itself and transcend into a new form without much human intervention (Pollock, 2019b). Regenerative tourism understands that visitors and destinations are part of a living system embedded in the natural environment, and operate under nature's rules and principles. The concept acknowledges the interconnectedness of various natural and social environments and is designed to give back to the land and the people. While this transformative term is starting to change the tourism industry's understanding, it brings significant challenge because tourism is not a set alone industry and overlaps with other industries. The crucial challenge will be the extent of human intervention, organisational and service development which may hinder the logic of life – let nature do its job by just providing conditions for life. The significant challenge for regenerative tourism is going to be destination management and marketing, and tourism product development, which will intervene in the natural tourism recovery processes.

Discussion and Conclusion

The tourism industry is very complex. Tourism product is intangible, cannot be stored or preserved, must be consumed now, or perished. Every tourism model before Covid-19 tried to increase visitor numbers in a set time and destination (Pollock, 2019b). More visitors will bring more spending, which will expand the number of businesses, which will lead to more jobs, and governments generate revenue through taxes. Gross domestic product is the measure of economic growth, it does not account for its negative impact on society's general wellbeing (Pollock, 2019b). A destinations economic activity may go up, but it may negatively influence social cohesion (Andrews & Stronach, 2020; Akaroa Voice, 2020). This is why the increase in visitor numbers can be devastating when visitor numbers exceed destination capacity, which often has limited infrastructure.

The trickle-down effects of the economy are not as practical as were anticipated (Schiller, 2015). Sustainable tourism development is mainly linked with economic benefits, which does not ensure the Gross National Happiness as an example of non-economic aspects of wellbeing which are not given equal weight. The new tourism model needs a holistic approach and requires a significant change at a deeper level, not just changing the terminologies. The change has to come

from positive psychology, where inspirational stories, motivational actions, and adaptation ingenuities need to lead the tourism industry. Tourism is not just a quick and easy job creation tool, rather a 'vector of positive change'. Tourism can offer holistic understanding of diverse cultures, bridge cultural gaps and encourage dialogue between civilisations to promote peace and harmony.

Positive psychology has understood the deeper conditions that help people live to their fullest, develop and evolve consciously. In similar fashion destinations and hosts need to evolve consciously and make fundamental decisions so that the tourism industry can move up a level in the framework of consciousness as shown in Figure 1 below. Actions taken by destinations/hosts and tourist/guests can be based on a conscious decision and awareness of the tourism industry at a deeper level. Tourism's sustainable practices are essential, but not necessary. Therefore, destinations need to become adaptable, creative and resilient to ensure improved wellbeing. This can be done by making conscious and mindful tourism marketing, product development and policy formulation regarding tourist generation and management decision to create awareness about how, when and where to travel. The key is the motivation to do so, and there is a significant challenge for management and marketing development without interfering much in the natural process of tourist dispersion. The status and condition of transport infrastructure will play a vital role in funnelling tourists from one destination to another. Therefore, a tourist/guest's impact on a destination/host is a crucial factor that motivates destinations and hosts to keep welcoming tourism and regenerate tourism industry. A nice place to live is often a nice place to visit. The health of the tourism industry will ultimately be determined by the health of destinations and the tolerance and level of welcoming of the host community.

Achieving a truly regenerative tourism model requires a shift in our conscious travel paradigm, with creative, adaptive, and resilient destinations.

Conscious Level · **Scenario Three**

Holistic normal
=> Destinations need to become more creative, adaptable, and resilient to ensure improved wellbeing

Tourists/Guests

- Conscious and mindful when traveling
- Awareness: Making informed decision and knowing about the impacts of travel
- Motivated to make a difference and doing things differently (at individual and society level)

Subconscious Level · **Scenario Two**

New normal
=> Destinations are at a state of fear of losing control over the situation

Tourists/Guests

- Travelers are in constant state of fear
- Some take risks as they resist change – rebellious

Unconscious Level · **Scenario One**

Back to normal
=> Destinations are overflooded with mass tourism, negative social impacts, economic instability, host-guest conflicts

Tourists/Guests

- Business as usual
- Tourism policy only focuses on increasing visitors' number
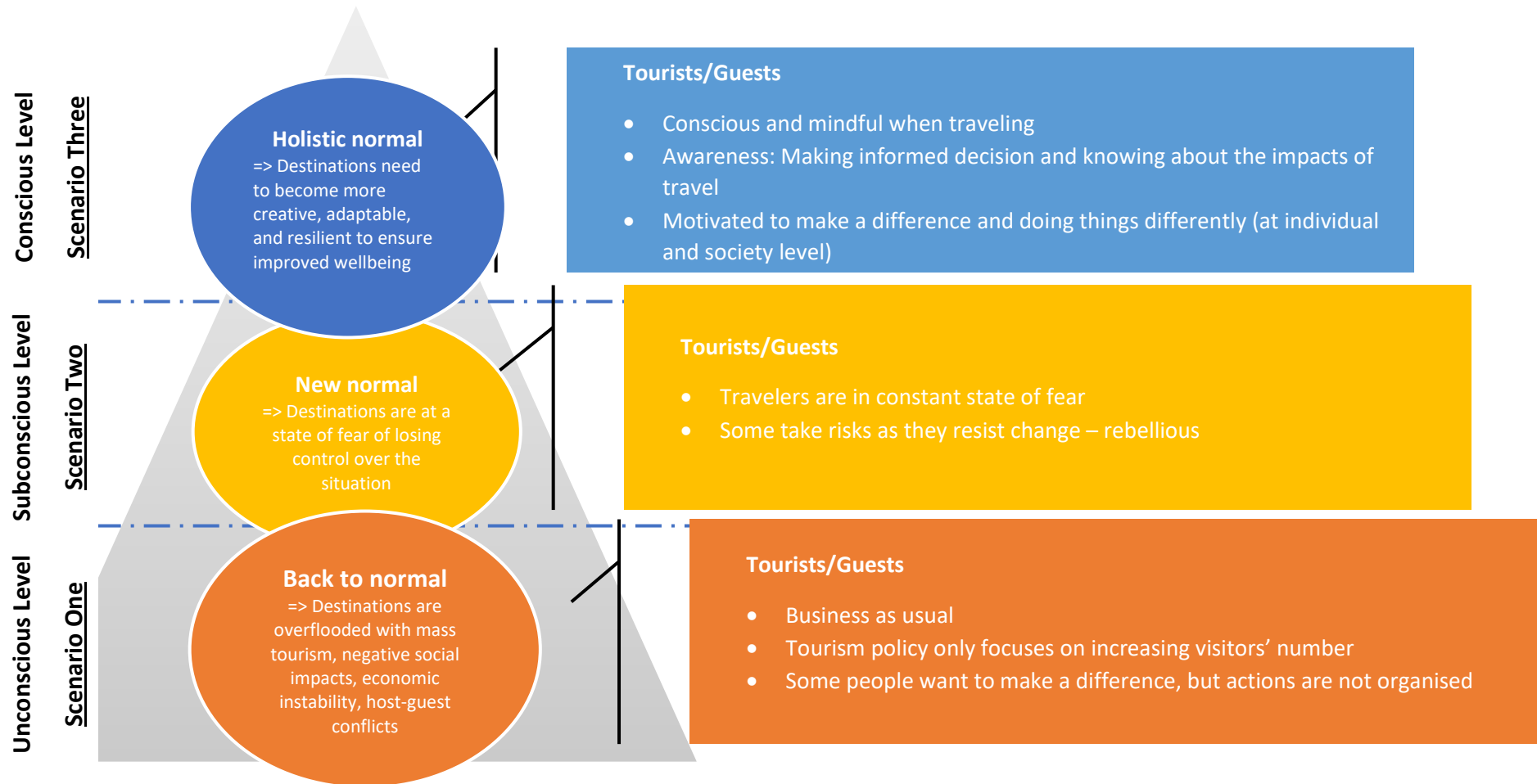- Some people want to make a difference, but actions are not organised

Figure 1. Conscious Travel Paradigm: between Destinations/Hosts and Travellers/Guests

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