

Healthy cities and tourism: integrating healthy lifestyles and tourism practices.

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Abstract.

Tourism is transforming many societies, economies and cities globally. As tourism increases globally, to hitherto unprecedented numbers, there are corresponding transformations in the urban environments catering for tourist practices. However, there is a divergence between the factors driving tourism, sustainability and health. Climate change and human health are two of biggest challenges facing society and both are affected by tourism. The environmental impacts linked to tourism are well known and these impacts tend to be unsustainable for the planet; such that the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) now sets targets to promote sustainable tourist development. Simultaneously, tourism also tends towards unhealthy lifestyles and practices, which the UN is actively trying to promote via their 'Healthy City' (UNHC) programme. However there is a gap in knowledge between the policies of sustainable tourism and those of healthy cities. This research examines how to integrate 'health' into sustainable tourist development. The health paradigm is moving away from a medical model towards one that unites healthy lifestyles and environments. This is more than just the reduction of pollutants or hazardous materials, but towards the design, construction and inhabitation of settlements that enable and promote healthy sustainable tourism.

Keywords: *tourism, healthy cities, sustainable development.*

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

This (article sets out some of the key issues and challenges in the framework for sustainable tourism and health. It begins by covering some of the key literature and establishing the theoretical framework for the research. It concludes by providing a critical summary of the next stages for the article.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Contemporary Tourist Practices

Tourist practices are radically changing many urban areas; transforming many historic and heritage based areas whilst generating new cities based entirely on tourism. The ‘kinetic elite’ are now roaming the planet looking for new experiences, new cultures and new environments to savour. Cheap package flights have enabled mass tourism on a global scale and even cheaper car, train and bus travel have enabled local tourism to boom. Local populations have been decimated in cities such as Venice, and have been largely replaced by temporary, tourist populations. Conversely, tourism cities such as Las Vegas, Benidorm and Dubai have been created explicitly for a tourist population; with a minority local population created to service the majority tourist population. Even in cities, towns and rural areas where tourism is a minor part of the economy and culture, the majority of the world’s inhabited environments are now affected to some extent by tourism.

Unfortunately for the tourist industry, it is often related to unsustainable development and unhealthy lifestyleⁱ. Given that climate change and public ill-health are two of the greatest challenges faced by society, tourism needs to become part of the solution to healthier, more sustainable lifestylesⁱⁱ. Fortunately, there are many overlaps between the strategies for sustainable development and policies to improve public health; however there are significant gaps in knowledge in how these relate or might be integrated with tourist practices. This research critically examines those gaps to establish a conceptual framework for healthier, sustainable place-based tourism.

2.2 Climate change: drivers, issues and solutions

Climate change is the most significant environmental danger to the planetⁱⁱⁱ. Human activities, particularly contemporary lifestyles, are identified as primary factors contributing to global warming^{iv}. Fossil fuels useage leads to the increase of CO₂ (and NO_x) levels in the atmosphere; this use of fossil fuels is generated by activities such as driving cars and vehicles, power generation and consumption^v, all of which are implicated in contemporary tourism. The drivers of climate change are also correlated to unhealthy human lifestyles and behaviours^{vi}. In order to tackle the combined issues of ill-health and climate change, the UN^{vii} has developed their Sustainable Development Goals. The UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (which replaced their Millennium Development Goals) have more of a focus on health; “*health has a central place as a major contributor to and beneficiary of sustainable development policies*”^{viii}. This centering on health is particularly relevant to tourism as so many tourist practices are implicated as drivers for ill-health^{ix}. Sustainable development is defined as “*development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”^x. Sustainable development comprises of three pillars: economic, environmental and social. There is a growing consensus that tourism must become healthier and more sustainable.

2.3 Health: drivers, issues and solutions

Globally there is growing ill-health. The majority of world's population now suffers from some form of ill-health^{xi}. These health issues are not isolated in a few nations, but are now common across all countries globally^{xii}. The causes of most illnesses are related to the lifestyles we lead; lack of exercise, sedentary activities, eating junk food, overeating, smoking etc^{xiii}. Tourist practices are imbricated in many of these lifestyle choices in complex and inter-dependent mechanisms. Tourism particularly is part of the “*globalization of unhealthy lifestyles*”^{xiv}. As tourism is predicted to grow steadily over the next few decades, the costs attributed to lifestyle disease are also predicted to grow. The financial impact of ill health is predicted to be thirty trillion dollars over the next decades, (ibid). Health needs to be considered as part of any sustainable industry, including tourism.

The World Health Organisation^{xv} defines health as the “*state of complete physical, mental and social well-being*”. Health comprises three areas: physical, mental and social and each need to be met for positive human health. Tourist practices are related to each of these three health spheres; however rather than address each one separately it is better to examine them in an integrated approach^{xvi}. Accordingly the World Health Organisation use their ‘Healthy City’ strategy to address health issues holistically^{xvii}. (Note: The term ‘healthy cities’ also refers to smaller towns, villages and rural settlements). Using place-based strategies for improving health is particularly relevant to tourism as it predominantly concerns the movement of people to new physical environments. By integrating health into ‘places’ it is possible to address all three aspects of health: *physical, mental and social*. An important part of the definition of health is: ‘*complete well-being*’ (WHO, ibid). Complete wellbeing encompasses the promotion of positive health improvements to a human's life. Healthy City strategies aim to improve not just basic health, but also improve levels of wellbeing. It is a fundamental aspect of health and wellbeing that any town or city must be sustainable.

2.4 Tourism, urbanization and shifting cities

The world is rapidly urbanizing, in fifty years ago two-thirds of the world lived in rural areas, in fifty years hence two-thirds of the population will inhabit urban areas^{xviii}. This urbanization is accompanied by a radical transformation by tourism. With over one billion tourists journeys annually, the scale and extent of global tourism is staggering^{xix}. This figure is greater than the combined population of North and South America. Contemporaneously, there has also been a radical shift in cultural behaviours, living and working practices. Tourism is a significant driver for this societal and urban change, with greater homogeneity in the modes in which society lives. Tourism can be part of the solution for a healthier and more sustainable planet.

The research article addresses how healthy city strategies, sustainable development goals and contemporary tourism practices might be integrated into a conceptual

framework. There is a gap in knowledge at this intersection, and this article aims to provide knowledge in this area. As tourism is set to grow in parallel with sustainable development goals and health promotion policies, this area is likely to be a growth area in academia. This research begins to provide a roadmap for future research in this area.

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