

THE ETHICAL ASPECTS OF TOURISM

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Abstract

The effects of tourism have always been in the focus of interest of tourism professionals. We know that it has both positive and negative impacts on societies, economies and on the environment but only a few attempts were made to find solutions for reducing its negative impacts. In our study we present three international examples that show how tourism can harm indigenous communities although those could easily be solved by setting up and keeping certain moral standards.

Keywords: ethical aspect, moral standard, sustainability, responsible tourism, consciousness

Introduction

The process of globalisation that has begun to flourish during the last couple of decades of the last century has changed the world's social and economic image, although the basic structure of human systems has remained the same. Economic growth, as a current social principle forced modern countries to involve more and more resources into the flows of economic circulation. Natural and human resources are the main sources of economy, capital and profit (SCHUMACHER, E. F. 1973, KORTEN, D. 1996). The goal of economy, apart from satisfying real needs is to make profit and extra profit. This is also proved by the current monetary world crisis

The conditions of global mobility are ensured by the development of newscasts and transportation and our quasi-conquest of space and time. Products money and humans move almost without any constraints or limits in the world. Local and global phenomena get a new content: locality can always be mobilised, natural resources, production, consumption and decisions can always be placed anywhere in the world within a few hours or days. Meanwhile at a certain moment in time the very same phenomenon is truly happening locally: living, producing and consuming can only happen within a certain space (BAUMANN, Z. 2002, WENT, R. 2002). Therefore the concept of glocality appeared which refers to the system of correspondence within an interaction. Within the glocal space and time system everything is related to everything. A locally happened event can began a globally effecting series of events, and a global phenomenon certainly has a concrete local effect as well. The changes of natural systems, biosphere and the human systems living together within it are not linear, infect they are rather chaotic (LÁSZLÓ E. 2001). Any changes within the complex system may have such consequences that cannot be exactly or anyhow forecasted. The responsibility of human planning is therefore highly important. During the history of humanity, decisions were determined by the short and medium-term interests of a small authoritarian group of people. During history several civilisations disappeared as a negative consequence of decisions concerning society, economy and the natural environment. Decisions concerned local or regional societies so far. But in the times of globalisation these decisions may determine the future of humankind as a whole. The global crisis that evolved during the last decades of the previous century is a consequence of the following: economic growth is unsustainable at a

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planet where the amount of resources are limited (MEADOWS ET AL.1972, 1992, 2004). The resolution of this crisis requires global responsibility that establishes global consciousness whose direction leads towards the common thrive, happiness and consummation of people living within nature.

The effects of tourism in the globalised space

In the globalised world at “nobody’s land”, borders have actually disappeared and the world and the opportunities within it have become unlimited (BAUMANN, Z. 2002), just like its risks (BECK, U. 2003). The unlimited opportunities of the world are open to all participants of tourism, having appropriate income and capital. Tourism as an economic sector produces profit and extra profit (e.g.: incentive tourism) by using natural and human resources. This process entail several negative consequences; it decays nature by using human and natural resources, damages people’s personality and physical state, destroys communities and in the worst case all these become useless for tourism.

Information and transportation systems create extremely favourable conditions for tourism. If we consider the annual average of the last couple of years it would clearly state that 60% of all participants in air transportation are tourists. More than 900 million tourists, about 13% of the world’s population, participate in international tourism each year (UNWTO, 2008). They are usually the citizens of rich modern countries. But of course this data is specious as most tourists travel more than once. So only about 3.5% of the world’s population participate in international tourism, the majority of world population never ever travels abroad, or not even within his/her own country. Travelling is the privilege of rich people. About 200 million people work in tourism, which makes 8% of all employees. A few years ago the annual profit of tourism was 470 billion USD which made about 38% of all export incomes and 11% of gross world production. Since then it has just increased. (Nowadays the overall annual income of international tourism is above one trillion USD.) This is why tourism is the leading economic sector of the world. (BROWN, L. 2002, UNWTO, 2008). According to LISA MASTNY (2002) tourism is one of the world’s least regulated sector, which makes serious impacts on the world’s ecological system, communities and cultures. MASTNY states that tourism can only be an advantage, a real development, if there is a balance between the needs of the government and the needs of the different participants of tourism.

The virtual online availability of services contributes to growth and makes the sector’s changes more dynamic. Modern information systems are able to quickly influence the everyday life of tourism, tourists’ choices, bookings and stakeholders’ decisions as well. The following cases that will show us a few typical problems of global tourism have also been found on the Internet.

According to the DELUXE.HU, French chefs were shocked by the action of a Bangkok hotel; therefore they refused their invitation to participate at the party where they would have prepared the dinner, worth 300,000 USD for the guests. The hotel organised a trip to the poorest region of the country for their 50 most important clients. The hotel’s aim with taking them by a private jet to Surin, the poorest region of Thailand was to call their client’s attention on the serious poverty that characterise Thailand and encourage them to make donations during the luxurious dinner. What the chefs found unethical was that the costs of the dinner were not donated to charities. So they refused the invitation for moral reasons. WWW.DELUXE.HU is a Hungarian website, and by publishing this event they have also made a criticism of it. One of the chefs said: “no luxurious dinner is needed to make us realise poverty”.

Global tourism physically brings poverty and wealth closer to each other, which often deepens tensions on religious-ethical, world-view and skin colour issues. In everyday life segregation separates the poor from the rich but such events in tourism as the above mentioned one brings them together and this increases tension. Though according to statistics it is rare that touristic sites become scenes of some violent and tragic conflicts, still we can hear more and more news about such incidents. It is obvious that no forms of aggression should be tolerated. Still, we can trace the way how indigenous communities get exploited and humiliated and therefore become exasperated and as a last attempt to act and rebel they might turn towards armed actions. These actions grow global terrorism (KORTEN, D. 1996). Other economic activities can also contribute to this, such as the working conditions and low wages of a multinational company or the devastation of natural environment because of stakeholder interests. The gap between rich and poor has never ever been so deep as nowadays, and it is deepening further continuously. About 800 million people are starving each day and another 2.5 million people eat only occasionally. In South-Eastern Asia about 50% of the population has less weight than he/she should have while in the USA 55% of the population is over-weight. Another striking data is that 60% of Indian newborns would end up at the emergency care if they were born in California, USA (BROWN, L. 2007). Such luxurious dinners in the shade of poverty humiliate human dignity. It is obvious that everybody has the right to be wealthy and afford luxury but there are certain limits beyond which it has no importance. This event was certainly beyond general moral values.

The following letter has been sent to us by a recently graduated tourism expert geographer from Malaysia: "It is difficult to get used to the supremacy of white people who come here from Singapore to ride a horse. The owner had thought it out very well: This farm is close to the Malaysian-Singapore border. Labour is very cheap in Malaysia and there are a lot of rich people in Singapore. He brought these two together. There are also many people working here from the Philippines for a mere pittance (HORVÁTH, L. 2007).

The source of extra profit produced by tourism is earned partly on that huge amount of very cheap labour force of poor countries whom investors mostly employ. These employees are mostly unskilled people who get inequitably low wages for their labour, and work among humiliating conditions in a defenceless situation (WENT, R. 2002). There is a growing number of tourists from wealthy countries who are visiting poor counties partly because they developed unique cultures within their exotic natural environment and also because the poverty of these countries foster the supremacy and arrogance of the otherwise middle-class visitors of wealthy countries. Global tolerance increases just as much as it decreases because of tourism.

The next event is really outstanding. Our main source was a Hungarian article of RÉKA MAGYAR who wrote about the strange event in *Turizmus Trend* magazine in June 2008. The original news that she used as a source was published by the *Guardian* in April 2008.*

In Cambodia, land speculations began after 1985. It played parts of towns and agricultural lands and forests into Sen Prime Minister's and his allies or into influential local or foreign stakeholders' hands. This process flourished mainly after the American events of 11th September 2001, when the international world of banks wavered. Several property stakeholders and land speculators appeared in Asia and Western millionaires began to replace their money and investments to the Eastern world. In 2006 and 2007 the only seaside resorts of Cambodia, around Sihanoukville has also been reached by the land seizure fever... The white sandy beaches and cheap cottages of the Sihanoukville-peninsula attracted mainly backpackers before that time. Those families who lived there were living from fishery and

* The writers of this study realised that several other international journals published an article about the same event, but many of them used different sources concerning their data. Therefore the data may vary compared to other articles. The description of the event in this study is relying mainly on Réka Magyar's article.

from those services that they offered for tourists. But their houses were demolished without any previous warning. This part of the seaside has been inhabited by them only for a couple of decades. First they had to move to Thailand to escape the brutal rule of the Khmer Rouge. After that, from the 1980s they gradually began to inhabit these extinct beaches, to live from fishery and cultivation, as according to the authorities they had no right to get back those lands that they had owned previously. In 2001 Sihanoukville's governor according to the Cambodian Land laws ensured them permanent and legal residency in the area saying that they also get the right to acquire that land by prescription after 5 years. It was the very same governor who in 2006 and 2007 ordered numerous of policemen and soldiers to evict hundreds of families. By the time the families got to realize what was going on their houses were on fire and got demolished. They could not even take their personal belongings and assets out. They were kept away from the burning ruins of their houses by electric truncheons and by shots in the air.

The only reason for this act was a statement from the Prime Minister according to which Cambodia's touristic attractiveness could compete with Thailand's or Bali's tourism. This is why he immediately emptied those beaches. By 2008 the country's every accessible, attractive sandy beaches were either in Cambodian or in foreign (Russian, Ukrainian, French, British, Chinese) private ownership. Those who were living there were simply evicted with little or without any compensation.

The displaced families live in tents beside the paths leading to the beach and are frightened by other evictions and those living in refugee camps have to face unbearable circumstances. Many children are ill because of the nomadic circumstances, the lack of water, sanitation and basic services. As the residents have lost all their cultivated lands and women are not employed at all, men have to work harder to earn enough to be able to feed their family. Protests led to mysterious deaths and threats, and even foreign human rights activists were slandered and deported.

Mainly British, French and Swiss speculators bought those lands by corruption, just to wait for that perfect moment when tourism begins to flourish in the area and those lands can be sold for a fortune. Hun Sen uniquely allowed the foundation of completely foreign companies. Nowadays 45% of all lands of Cambodia are privately owned. Since 1989 the government has been denying the rights of about 360,000, previously exiled Cambodians. Thousands of people got homeless because of unexpected evictions (and natural disasters) during the last decade and even nowadays AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL estimates that there are about 150,000 people threatened by forcibly eviction.

The official tourism marketing publishes this event as a great success, by saying: Cambodia decided to invest in tourism, and wants to develop it into a leading sector in order to foster economic growth and fight poverty. Together with Laos and Vietnam, as a participant of the Mekong Tourism Development Project, Cambodia decided to save cultural and natural goods and introduce sustainable tourism mainly in backward regions.

While in and around Sihanoukville the beaches are emptied for the sake of mass tourism, for planned hotel constructions and golf-courses, in the North-Eastern region of the country, in the Jungles sustainable ecotourism is being introduced. Even the Cambodian Hotel Association that was formed in 2005 emphasizes its commitment towards sustainable tourism, having environmental protection, cultural heritage protection and the creation of social harmony in its focus. The gap between reality and the official marketing is unacceptable.

Another reason for the increase of bull market is that Chevron announced that they have found a prospective oil land near the beaches of Sihanoukville. Therefore the government announced that they will soon begin oil extraction in the region by the support of international companies (MAGYAR R. 2008).

The free movement of speculation capitals causes huge damages in Third World countries. Hopefully the publicity of this event has stopped further speculations for a while, though the unscrupulous way of capital exchanging and the cynicism of participants are astonishing. But we have to understand that this event was a very rare opportunity as this could only happen because of the social-political relations that emerged after a strict dictatorship. Most Third World countries are unable to handle Western type of businesses. After the dictatorship and the destitution they would like to live a good life. This is a fundamental wish and right of everybody. But there is a lack of self-defensive strategies and strong communities, the society has been torn into two parties: the powerful authoritarian and the poor masses of people. Breach of authority and their corruption is extremely high in South-Eastern Asia.

Western economic models get to Third World countries without any criticism and reconsideration. These countries sacrifice a lot in the hope of fast enrichment and catching up with other countries and they just rarely realize their mistakes in time – often only with some kind of Western help – and begin to act in a responsible manner, trying to protect their true values and heritage, like in Ladakh (NORBERG-HODGE, H. 1991). The pressure of global capital and the local authority's corruptness result in such events as the above described one. The other problem is that most visitors do not know much about Cambodia they are quite ignorant and illiterate considering their knowledge of Cambodia. As they are usually coming from urban areas, they do not have any ecological knowledge and their short stays do not encourage them to protect the environment. They do not understand system theories; therefore they do not realize the impacts and consequences of their trips, actions and behaviours so they do not see their own personal responsibility in the whole process. They usually do not know much about the local cultures either; do not respect local traditions or indigenous people. But their generous spending give the impression that they are very rich, they seem to spend money easily therefore for the indigenous society it seems that they must have earned that money easily as well (NORBERG-HODGE, H. 1991). Just like local poverty and ethical-religious conflicts this phenomena also increases global migration: hopeless people begin their journeys based on such images that are further strengthened by advertisements and the media.

In global tourism South-Eastern Asia is an increasingly attractive destination. Those countries in the area were defenceless against colonization and dictatorships during the modern era. Their social and economic systems are vulnerable and unstable. Those societies and local communities do not have own consciousness or any self-defensive strategies. The local communities are weak, people do not speak any foreign languages, and they do not have any legal-economic knowledge either. They have lost their braveness and dignity during the historical storms. And their confusion is increasing by the Western model of consumption and by the physical closeness of wealth with which tourists, internet, television and other advertisements infest them. Most indigenous communities evaluate the aggressive Western culture as one that is worth to be copied by them. They get used to the Western world's consumption models without any changes (NORBERG-HODGE, H. 1991). Their income from tourism is very important in order to make a living; therefore they are at the mercy of tourism investors and consumers.

In the practice of tourism, it is a general phenomenon that there are only a few specialists who are able to think in complex systems. Usually the traditional economic approach is still dominant. This fact causes extremely serious problems in such poor countries where tourism related incomes would play a very important role in the country's economy, if tourism was not under the ownership of foreign investors, whose income's big proportion leaves the home country. This proportion may even reach 80% (Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Belize). It is a regular phenomenon that the intensive consumption of tourists and investments cause inflation which increase poverty. The GATS require the abolition of protectionism, and governments cannot expect the utilization of local natural resources either. (GEORGE, S.

2001). On one hand, the high number of unskilled employees is a positive factor. On the other hand these people get low wages, their status highly depend on seasonality and they do not have enough time and money for becoming more skilled (maids, kitchen employees, etc.). About 15-20 million children are also employed in this sector (MATNY, L. 2002). This fact is quite astonishing. Most children are of course working under parental supervision, but many are doing humiliating works among poor conditions and are defenceless against their employers.

It is risky to depend on tourism, as it is the most sensitive sector of economy. Numerous examples show such cases where a political, economic or environmental crisis or some kind of epidemics caused the recession of tourism. The current monetary and economic crisis will also have a great impact on international tourism. Its impacts on the natural environment are surely negative. Tourists usually travel great distances and transportation has a great negative impact on the environment. Luxurious services and consumption bring further burdens about with which beaches, savannas and rainforests will need to cope. The ecological footprint of tourists is much higher as of those people who are living their everyday lives at home. A comparable database of this would be useful in order to evaluate the environmental loads objectively.

Responsible tourism

The abolition of borders and the possibility and reality of freedom is a huge experience and a great result in human history. Without responsibility, freedom and living without limits and borders brings numerous risks about, both in individuals' and communities' lives. In human history so far it has never been possible to experience this state of mind. Freedom can only ensure the well-being and safety of people together with responsibility. Therefore a new level of individual and communal responsibility has to be developed and experienced. At the beginning of the learning process, responsibility will seem to be a border, as it is not a "natural" characteristic of human kind. When people become free they experience an unlimited world, they loose their sense of reality and morality (VIRILIO, P. 2002). Therefore different types of limits would need to be established, like judicial, economic and ethical limits. But this requires people to undertake responsibility and to be able to decide responsibly. This requires the knowledge of a systematic approach and a harmonious personality.

Tourism specialists have early realized the negative impacts of global mass tourism. In the MANILA DECLARATION of 1980 the protection of physical environment has already been emphasized. The ACAPULCO DOCUMENTS of 1982 have already analysed the moral and environmental responsibilities of tourism developments. The BRUNDTLAND REPORT (1987) also known as "Our Common Future" was the first document that talked about the concept of sustainable development in world politics. In 1995 the LANZAROTE CHARTER FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM (UNEP, UNESCO, EU) was planning how sustainable development could be put into practice and the AGENDA 21 FOR THE TRAVEL AND TOURISM INDUSTRY (1996) was developed according to the plans and theories of the Rio Conference. We should also emphasize the importance of the "GLOBAL CODE OF ETHICS FOR TOURISM" which was officially recognised by the UN General Assembly on 21st December 2001. In 2005 the so called "White Book" of tourism took the "GLOBAL CODE OF ETHICS FOR TOURISM" as a strategic aspect that would need to be discussed in detail. It emphasized the need to highlight the important role of tourism in achieving peace and sustainable development. Another important turning point was the UNESCO CONVENTION ON THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS that was set to come into effect in 2007. These

international documents are the most important ones, numerous other global and regional pacts, declarations, documents and rules have also been issued.

The “GLOBAL CODE OF ETHICS FOR TOURISM” is an outstanding intellectual product which covers every aspects and forms of responsible tourism, system of correspondence, from biological diversity to cultural diversity, from economic responsibility to moral responsibility:

Article 1:

“The understanding and promotion of the ethical values common to humanity, with an attitude of tolerance and respect for the diversity of religious, philosophical and moral beliefs, are both the foundation and the consequence of responsible tourism; stakeholders in tourism development and tourists themselves should observe the social and cultural traditions and practices of all peoples, including those of minorities and indigenous peoples and to recognize their worth;”

Article 2

“Tourism [...] should be planned and practised as a privileged means of individual and collective fulfilment [...]” (GLOBAL CODE OF ETHICS FOR TOURISM, 2001).

The Codes deserve to have the UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as one of its important references (1948).

Responsible and ethical behaviour cannot be questioned at a community’s social responsibility level or at any other levels. It is a promising phenomenon that more and more enterprises tend to join such business societies. But unfortunately sometimes we have to realize that some of the declarations are just a type of advertisement a tricky PR technique without much content in the background. But the process has begun and we can see several positives examples already. It is part of the process that we first realize the negative effects of tourism and then we change our strategy. For real changes we need a complete paradigm shift. Sustainable development cannot be achieved within the current structure of our world, serious structural changes are needed. The deepening monetary and economic crisis will enforce these changes.

Summary

Globalisation created a borderless world at physical level. However, there are cultural and ecological borders as well, that cannot be opened by judicial means. It cannot be and it should not be opened up that way as that would cause the disappearance of both biological and cultural diversity, though these are the essence of life and the main motivation of tourism: the new, the one to be discovered and understood. The homogenizing effect of globalisation is already a great threat and is very harmful for diversity. And this is further increased by tourism. This is why there is a need for such boundaries that protect the diverse local natural and social environment, economic stability and also serve real development (VIRILLIO, P 2002).

There is a need for ethical boundaries. A deep analysis would also show that every ethical decision has a serious racial basis. Pollution is destroying the biosphere therefore, its beauty is fading, so it loses its attractiveness and as a result, touristic incomes are going to be less. The violent exploitation of people and communities result in further violence. These are such facts that are also decisive for the market on the short and middle-term.

Western countries consider themselves rationalistic but in reality their rationalism is based only on money market. Therefore these correspondences have to be counteracted by an ethical approach. Everything is related with everything or as it is often said in English: “Everything happens for a reason”. The analysis and evaluation of this can happen from a system approach, from a holistic approach or also from an ethical approach. The result is the same.

Throughout history, humans have developed such self-controlling systems that are supposing one another and this way ensure its and the communities safety. Rationality and ethics not only suppose one another but also strengthen each other. Respecting every manifestation of life and human dignity by everybody is valid everywhere at all times.

This study also wishes to serve the realization of this view.

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