Chapter 4

Unleashing the 'Wind of Thought': Paving the Way Towards Conscientious and Humane Tourism Destinations

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Abstract

The tourism industry is facing significant challenges in an ever-changing world marked by globalisation, digitalisation and societal shifts. The issues of overtourism and massification exacerbate concerns about sustainability and the industry's impact on the environment and local communities. These concerns arise as profit-driven ideologies overshadow the industry's original vocation to contribute to meaningful encounters, well-being and social justice. This chapter explores the cultivation of humaneness and conscience within tourism through education, knowledge and personal reflection. Drawing inspiration from Hannah Arendt's interpretation of Socrates' philosophy, it highlights the importance of critical thinking and a comprehensive understanding of the industry's role in shaping alternative futures. Tourism higher education plays a pivotal role in empowering students to become catalysts for systemic transformation. Furthermore, this chapter emphasises the value of embracing diverse viewpoints and engaging in meaningful encounters and dialogues with local communities and stakeholders to collaboratively imagine and implement sustainable practices. Only by dismantling entrenched habits through critical thinking and fostering collaboration can the tourism industry envision alternative trajectories towards a more conscientious and humane path forward.

Keywords: Conscience; humaneness; critical thinking; Hannah Arendt; Socrates; education; encounters

Introduction

The tourism industry, like many other sectors, is facing a number of major challenges in today's rapidly changing world. Globalisation, digitalisation and shifting societal dynamics, such as growing individualism, isolation and inequalities, are affecting the way we interact with each other and with the environment, and even the way we travel and experience tourism destinations. Alongside these changes, the tourism sector grapples with critical issues, such as overtourism and massification, which have been eroding the very essence of meaningful travel and raising fundamental questions about the sustainability and consciousness of the tourism sector in its current trajectory. Indeed, the correlates of consumer culture, commodification and neoliberal logics of profits at all cost have imbued global tourism (Wearing et al., 2019) and weakened its original social function, i.e. its vocation to contribute to meaningful encounters, well-being and peace (Higgins-Desbiolles & Blanchard, 2010).

In order to tackle these challenges and create a more sustainable and responsible tourism industry, rethinking the way we travel is crucial. The COVID-19 pandemic, and a growing awareness of the gravity of the climate crisis and of the increasing economic and social inequalities, have contributed substantially to a growing need on the visitors' side for authenticity, meaning and purpose. In this context, new concepts such as humanistic (Della Lucia & Giudici, 2021), wise (Coca-Stefaniak, 2020), responsible (Goodwin & Francis, 2003), eco, restorative, regenerative (Bellato et al., 2022), spiritual (Wang et al., 2023) and transformative tourism have come to the fore. The concept of 'destination conscience' underpins these concepts by emphasising the need for destinations to develop sensitivity, humaneness and a moral compass, in other words, a conscience.

While it is not within the scope of this essay to provide a full overview of the long and complex history of the concepts of humaneness and conscience, the section 'On Humaneness and Conscience' of this contribution will be devoted to briefly retrace a few milestones that underpin these two key concepts. In 'Hannah Arendt's Socrates and the "Wind of Thought"', drawing inspiration from Hannah Arendt's insights on the figure of Socrates, I will explore the potential of education, knowledge and personal reflection in cultivating humaneness and conscience. Building on these considerations, in 'Towards Humane and Conscientious Tourism Destinations' and 'Conclusion', I will emphasise the importance of tourism higher education to provide a platform for students to develop critical thinking and a deeper understanding of their role in the industry, empowering them to become agents of systemic transformation. Furthermore, I will also highlight the importance of embracing diverse perspectives and engaging in meaningful dialogues, not only within the tourism sector but also with local communities and other stakeholders. By dismantling ingrained habits and co-creating sustainable

practices through collaboration, we can envision alternative futures and chart new trajectories for a more conscientious and humane tourism sector.

On Humaneness and Conscience

Unlike humanity, which is constitutive of human nature, humaneness reflects 'the never-ending human struggle to overcome the boundaries of egoism and parochialism' (Ranzenigo, 2022). As explained by Aulus Gellius (*Attic Nights*, XIII 17), the Latin *humanitas* contains elements of both the Greek concepts of φιλανθρωπία (*philantropia*) and παιδεία (*paideia*), 'liberal education' (Liddell & Scott, 1925). Humaneness, philanthropy and, in a broad sense, humanism – a classical concept revived in the Renaissance by Pico della Mirandola – represent the humane form of existence, the common core containing a natural sympathy with others, emphasising human dignity and welfare, benevolence and optimism about the power of reason and sensitivity. Its educational approach (*paideia*) enables lives of personal fulfilment and the pursuit of an ideal of humaneness.

Conscience is a more complex concept that has engaged psychologists, philosophers of religion, philosophers of mind, epistemologists and ethicists for a long time (Dimmock & Fisher, 2017), even more so as it is not an univocal term: indeed, various meanings have been attributed to it over time (McKeever, 2023). The term derives from the Latin *con-scientia*, which partly overlaps with the Greek term συνείδησις (*syneidesis*) (Langston, 2001), thus implying 'knowledge, a knowledge shared with another, consciousness of right or wrong doing, [i.e.] conscience' (Liddell & Scott, 1925). Indeed, central to conscience is in fact a dichotomy, a bipolarity (McKeever, 2023), the presence of someone or something with whom the knowledge is shared with, even if it is oneself. Conscience is often perceived as an internal voice that is supposedly always present within us and identifies those activities which, if engaged with, would endanger the individual's inner harmony, e.g. by causing afterthoughts (Arendt, 1971). But to whom does this internal voice whispering in our ear about what is wrong and what is right belong to?

Forces outside the individual have tormented humans for their wrongdoings since the beginning of time: in Euripides' homonymous tragedy, Orestes is plagued by the Erinyes, having killed his own mother to avenge his father. Although not all aspects of the modern concept of conscience were already present in antiquity, indeed the presence of the Erinyes, visible only to Orestes' eyes, is nothing more than a 'critical and emotional awareness of one's own moral conduct' (Bosman, 1993).

Although the concept made its fortune in the religious context, even in the Middle Ages, conscience had little (or at least not only) to do with religious belief. In fact, it is rather a moral category in conjunction with the natural law common to all individuals, even non-believers (Leone, 2020). Thomas Aquinas argued that conscience is only a guide, pushing us to focus on others rather than ourselves, that does not have direct epistemic access to the source of knowledge, i.e. to God, therefore, it can be wrong and at odds with another's (see also Dimmock &

Fisher, 2017; Giubilini, 2016): despite this, conscience is binding, as it is what we take to be God's commands, and to act against one's conscience is the same as disobeying God (Shin, 2014). A few centuries later, Martin Luther's proclamation at the Diet of Worms in 1521 constitutes a milestone in the evolution of the concept of conscience: 'I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience' (Watson, 1957), thus proclaiming the infallibility of the God-given conscience. He, and others after him, e.g. Immanuel Kant with his categorical imperative, viewed conscience as a distinct faculty within human beings, and we owe it to them that conscience is still seen as a 'voice' or 'judge' within us showing us the way to act and do what is right in each situation (Langston, 2001).

On a more secular account, conscience can also be understood as a merely relativistic notion whose content changes according to social, cultural and familial circumstances (Giubilini, 2016). A notable example is Freud, who theorises that conscience is a product of our upbringing, the internalised authority derived from societal and religious rules that controls our primal drives and, being a social construct, it can be questioned and treated with some scepticism (Dimmock & Fisher, 2017). Over time, Freud's theories have been questioned and very often refuted however, conscience seems indeed to be influenced by the sociocultural context in which it operates, and, according to the neurophilosopher Patricia Churchland, even our genes and the very way our brain is wired by evolution also have a say in shaping one's moral compass (Churchland, 2019).

Finally, conscience cannot simply be categorised as an innate quality that an individual either possesses or lacks, except in exceptional cases; we can rather consider it as a spectrum (Perathoner, 2023), with the majority of individuals existing somewhere in between the two extremes. On one side of this spectrum are those that completely lack a moral compass, feelings of guilt, remorse, compassion and empathy, i.e. psychopaths (Churchland, 2019; Shin, 2014). On the other extreme side of the spectrum are those people whose pangs of conscience are so frequent and incessant that they completely inhibit their action, the so-called scrupulous or 'do-gooders' (Churchland, 2019, p. 139). It is indeed possible to have too much of a good thing: as the ancients already well knew, *in medio stat virtus*.

Hannah Arendt's Socrates and the 'Wind of Thought'

Despite being a fundamental cornerstone in Hannah Arendt's reflections, her notion of conscience has not received much attention, as she tended to write mostly in terms of thinking, rather than conscience (Adair-Toteff, 2022). Arendt, one of the leading political thinkers of the 20th century, devoted a significant portion of her philosophical work to grapple the significance and historical impact of totalitarian regimes. In particular, she pondered on how ordinary individuals could conform to the dictates of Nazism and Stalinism, and be complicit, even if only by being silent, in acts of immense evil, without showing resistance to the

moral atrocities that these regimes perpetrated. In her renowned and contentious book Eichmann in Jerusalem (1963), through the exemplification of this grey German bureaucrat's figure, Arendt explored the banality of evil. She shed light on the unsettling reality that Eichmann's meticulous orchestration of the extermination of Jews did not stem from an alleged monstrous nature completely devoid of conscience – what Patricia Churchland would classify as psychopathy – but rather from thoughtless obedience and conformity. Indeed, Eichmann, and with him entire nations, simply embraced a different, flawed kind of conscience that dictated blind obedience: they internalised the voice of the regime and made it their own moral compass without questioning it (Arendt, 1994). Her conclusion was that it was a lack of thinking, i.e. the ability to look at something from another person's point of view that resulted in a lack of conscience. But how could millions of people fall into the general ethical slumber that led to the horrors of the 20th century?

Arendt supported the idea of fragmentary historiography, she thus sought to identify ruptures in history to redeem from the past those moments worth preserving and provide sources of illumination for the present (d'Entreves, 2022). She provocatively attributed one of these ruptures to Plato, whose influence has persisted throughout the centuries within the Christian and Western tradition and created the conditions for the moral slumber that enabled the holocaust and the gulags (Forti, 2015).

Since Socrates, the Greek philosopher who lived at the end of the 5th century BC did not believe in the written word, he is known to us primarily through the indirect accounts of Plato and Xenophon. Arendt sought to differentiate and even juxtapose Socrates' philosophy with that of Plato, aiming to challenge the portrayal of Socrates as depicted by his disciple. While this distinction may raise questions from a historical and philological perspective, it is crucial to acknowledge that Arendt's objective was not to provide a precise historical reconstruction of Socrates' life and philosophy but rather to assign him a representative function (Arendt, 1971).

In her reconstruction (Arendt, 1971, 2005), Socrates used to engage the citizens of Athens in a series of aporetic dialogues, seeking to challenge the obviousness of their prejudgments and beliefs. His intention was not so much to dismiss others' views to impose his own: on the contrary, 'he knew that he knew nothing'. His aim was rather a political one, as he sought to eradicate dogmatism and assist citizens in bringing true opinions (*doxai*) to life by contemplating alternative perspectives – essentially, to unleash the 'wind of thought': he infected citizens with his own perplexities, which is 'the only way thinking can be taught' (Arendt, 1971, p. 431). In attempting to teach himself and others how to think, Socrates did question the rules in force, an approach that was misunderstood by the *polis*, that sentenced him to death on charges of corrupting Athenian youth (Arendt, 1994).

Plato, deeply affected by Socrates' faith, developed a sense of disillusionment and scepticism towards the multitude of *doxai* in favour of a monopolising truth and lost all confidence in the possibility of philosophers engaging in dialogue with citizens and politics in general. He thus envisioned a utopian society, governed by the enlightened few, where the normative principle of unity and singularity took

precedence over the diversity and complexity of human perspectives. According to Arendt, Plato's longing for a rigid and harmonious order represented a departure, and even a betrayal, from Socrates' emphasis on critical thinking, open dialogue and the exploration of multiple viewpoints, and caused a clear separation and even enmity between philosophy and politics that marked the fate of later Western thought. Socrates and Plato function for Arendt as paradigms of two opposing theoretical paths: on the one hand the Socratic relativistic approach, on the other the Platonic approach, which later prevailed and led to the understanding of conscience as normative and prescriptive, e.g. as the voice of God, that is not to be questioned, but just obeyed (Forti, 2015). And when not questioning dogmas, values, rules, what is good and what is evil, becomes the normality, we get used to never making up our mind, which makes us vulnerable to manipulation, as anyone could provide a new set of unchecked rules (Arendt, 1971).

One of the most important legacies that Arendt attributed to Socrates is that of the discovery of the duality inherent in the activity of thought: he conceived thinking as an activity that presupposes the 'two-in-one' (*Gorgias*, 482 b7–c3), a soundless dialogue between me and myself which makes me verify my own moral conduct (Arendt, 1971, 2005). Solitude becomes a necessary condition for all forms of thought because the company of others interrupts my internal dialogue and makes the 'two-in-one' become again a 'one', thus momentarily silencing my inner voice. Arendt warns not to mistake this for an invitation for philosophers to abstract from society to dedicate themselves to pure contemplation, as Plato would suggest. Instead, she emphasises that our inherent duality, the 'two-in-one', is common to all human beings and carries the germ of multitude. Even when we are alone, we are in company, the company of ourselves (Arendt, 1994). Only those who know how to live in harmony with themselves (i.e. not in contradiction with their conscience) are capable of living in harmony with others. And this inherent plurality is the condition that corresponds to action (d'Entreves, 2022). According to Arendt, this inner dialogue is highly individual and can result in varying consciences, even at odd with each other. As a result, she expresses scepticism towards conscience due to its self-regarding nature and instead emphasises the importance of political judgements that include other selves (external to us) in our imaginings, i.e. the enlarged mentality (May, 1983). However, departing from Arendt's viewpoint, I perceive these two aspects as closely interconnected in the context of this discussion. Indeed, while maintaining inner harmony may be a self-interested and individualistic aim, it is important to note that harming others would ultimately disrupt our own inner harmony. In this sense, our conscience acts as a safeguard against wrongdoing, as it recognises that committing harm goes against our own self-interest. As Socrates would argue, it is preferable to endure suffering rather than to inflict harm (Arendt, 1971). In essence, I believe, in the wake of May (May, 1983), that self-interest (our own well-being) and benevolence (the well-being of others) merge through our conscience. By refraining from harming others, we ultimately preserve our own inner harmony and align our actions with a sense of ethical responsibility.

Having laid the theoretical foundation through an exploration of Arendt's interpretation of Socrates, I will now delve deeper into the practical implications of these reflections and their relevance to the concept of humane and conscientious tourism destinations. It is important to note that while I draw inspiration from Arendt's ideas, my interpretation is my own, and I aim to use her concepts as a framework to initiate considerations on tourism without seeking an exhaustive analysis of Arendt's philosophy.

Towards Humane and Conscientious Tourism Destinations

Many have hoped for COVID-19 to be one of the ruptures in history that could have redeemed the tourism industry from its relentless pursuit of growth and profit at the expense of environmental integrity and social well-being (Cavagnaro, 2023). Indeed, the pandemic imposed a forced pause on us which offered the unique opportunity to have that solitude which, according to Arendt, is a fundamental prerequisite for our internal dialogue, our 'two-in-one' to happen and which would have thus allowed us to re*think* the fundamental principles and values that shape the trajectory we wish the tourism industry to follow. However, even before the declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO) of the end of the pandemic in May 2023, it has become evident that the transformative potential of this pause was not fully realised, as we quickly relapsed into old unsustainable habits and practices (Cavagnaro, 2023). But there is hope that, by encouraging critical thinking and envisioning alternative futures, we can still strive for a more conscientious and humane tourism sector.

Even if Arendt struggles to bridge thought and action, the close connection she draws between the two gives hope that fostering critical thinking will pave the way for questioning the capitalistic and consumerist paradigm that afflicts the tourism industry and thus promote systemic change. According to Arendt, Socrates' lesson, the need to unleash the 'wind of thought', is an antidote to the risk of repeating our mistakes and falling back into the trap of 'business as usual'.

In this context, several recommendations can be identified. Firstly, reorienting tourism education is essential. Indeed, the potential – and responsibility – of tourism higher education to affect, directly or indirectly, the whole tourism industry, has already been rightly pointed out (Ayikoru et al., 2009), as well as its dire need to include a more humanistic approach to its curricula through the inclusion of humanistic managerial practices and values-based principles (Della Lucia et al., 2021), but also, more broadly, of the humanities – in particular philosophy and the arts (Caton, 2014). In fact, humaneness and conscience share the characteristic of not being an inherent trait – as shown in the previous sections of this contribution – that someone is either born with or without, but are rather linked with education and knowledge, respectively. This means that they can be cultivated, if not even taught, through a combination of education (*paideia*), experience and personal reflection. And with knowledge and education, in the wake of Hannah Arendt, I do not mean mere instruction and notionistic and instrumental top-down impartations, but rather the 'ability to tell right from

wrong, beautiful from ugly' (Arendt, 1971, p. 446), i.e. the process of nurturing aesthetic sensitivity, search for meaning and critical thinking (Holt, 2020). It is the ignition of a spark that awakens individuals to the importance of humaneness and conscience in their actions and decisions. Moreover, a closer interaction with real-world tourism contexts through a stronger focus on internships, field trips and community engagement projects is needed. This hands-on approach would provide students with opportunities to observe and reflect on the social, economic and environmental impacts of tourism, fostering a deeper understanding of the industry's complexities. Tourism education should thus provide an institutional space for students to cultivate a deeper understanding of their role in the hospitality industry and an awareness of their own agency and political potential (Cator, 2022). Students should learn to engage in meaningful dialogue with themselves ('two-in-one') by thoughtfully posing unanswerable questions of meaning, as suggested by Holt (2020). This would help students, future practitioners and managers to develop 'the capacity to care and to feel compassion for others, the imagination to dream up alternative futures, and the moral compass to move us in the direction we want to go' (Caton, 2014, p. 31).

Furthermore, promoting sustainable practices should be a priority across all sectors of the tourism industry. Arendt rightfully observes that different consciences can lead to different conclusions, indicating that what may bother one person might not trouble another. To address this, it is still important for tourism destinations, but also states and other organisations, to provide and promote a framework of values and to establish a shared understanding of ethical standards and expectations. This framework serves as a common ground that enables individuals with diverse consciences to find a basic alignment and work towards a collective purpose. Governments and international organisations play a vital role in shaping the tourism industry through policies, regulations, guidelines, such as the Sustainable Development Goals developed by United Nations, and incentives for conscientious practices. Establishing and enforcing policies that promote equal opportunities, human rights, education and sustainable practices to minimise environmental impacts of tourism are fundamental. Rules and policies should, however, not be treated as rigid and unchangeable but rather as a basis and tools for ongoing democratic dialogue, learning and adaptation. Encouraging critical thinking within this framework allows for a dynamic and iterative process of testing and reconsidering these rules to ensure their effectiveness and relevance. It enables stakeholders to question the status quo, challenge assumptions and explore innovative solutions that may better address the specific needs and challenges of their own context and for contingent situations that may arise.

Another key aspect is the involvement and empowerment of local communities. Indeed, an enlightened elite of future practitioners and managers alone cannot bring about the necessary transformation. Arendt's Socrates shows us that to be able to imagine alternative futures and spur action, we need to challenge deeply ingrained habits, crystallised knowledge and unexamined ways of thinking. This can only be achieved through a collective effort. The tourism industry has to

embrace the *doxai* – the diverse perspectives and opinions of others, also beyond the industry itself – and learn from others. It is, therefore, crucial to engage more in participation and open dialogue with local communities and other stakeholders (Volgger, 2023). By including these diverse voices in the tourism discussion, the industry can gain invaluable insights and foster a deeper understanding of the needs and aspirations of all those involved, as well as be able to envision radical alternatives (Volgger, 2023). Moreover, the promotion of community-based tourism initiatives is essential. These initiatives serve to distribute the benefits (and not only the costs, as is often the case) of tourism more equitably among the local community rather than concentrating them in the hands of a few. Furthermore, such empowerment ensures that the community is actively involved in decision-making processes, fostering a sense of ownership and allowing for more sustainable and responsible tourism practices. This inclusive approach ensures that the trajectory of tourism is shaped collectively and stretches beyond a narrow focus on profit and growth by prioritising shared values, sustainability, human dignity and welfare.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique opportunity to re-evaluate our priorities and address the pressing issues of overconsumption, environmental degradation and social inequalities within the tourism industry. As the emergency fades away, the risk of falling back to the previous patterns of growth and profit-oriented practices becomes increasingly concrete. However, an antidote to the risk of repeating our mistakes exists in the form of what Arendt's Socrates calls the 'wind of thought'. By unleashing it, we may still have hope to break free from beaten tracks. Tourism higher education plays a fundamental role in nurturing the 'wind of thought' by equipping future practitioners and managers with the necessary tools to critically question engrained habits and envision alternative futures and grasp their agential potential. This can be achieved through a stronger focus in academic curricula on interdisciplinarity, experiential learning and ethical and values-based education. Furthermore, there is a need for the tourism industry, governments and other organisations to promote shared frameworks of values and ethical standards through policies and guidelines. This requires striking a delicate balance between establishing top-down regulations that function as a common basis and allowing for flexibility through ongoing democratic dialogue and adaptation. Finally, the innate plurality inherent in our human nature serves as a reminder that we need to embrace diverse perspectives (*doxai*) and engage in meaningful dialogues with local communities and stakeholders. Only through a collective effort, framed in shared values, informed by critical thinking and driven by a shared commitment to sustainability and social justice, can we pave the way for a more transformative, conscientious and humane tourism sector.

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