

Socialising tourism after COVID-19: reclaiming tourism as a social force?

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Abstract

Purpose – This article considers the possibilities of and barriers to socialising tourism after the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Such an approach allows us to transform tourism and thereby evolve it to be of wider benefit and less damaging to societies and ecologies than has been the case under the corporatised model of tourism.

Design/methodology/approach – This conceptual analysis draws on the theorisation of "tourism as a social force" and the new concept of "socialising tourism". Using critical tourism approaches, it seeks to identify the dynamics that are evident in order to assess the possibilities for socialising tourism for social and ecological justice. It employs an Indigenous perspective that the past, present and future are interconnected in its consideration of tourism futures.

Findings – COVID-19 has fundamentally disrupted tourism, travel and affiliated industries. In dealing with the crisis, borders have been shut, lockdowns imposed and international tourism curtailed. The pandemic foregrounded the renewal of social bonds and social capacities as governments acted to prevent economic and social devastation. This disruption of normality has inspired some to envision radical transformations in tourism to address the injustices and unsustainability of tourism. Others remain sceptical of the likelihood of transformation. Indeed, phenomena such as vaccine privilege and vaccine tourism are indicators that transformations must be enabled. The authors look to New Zealand examples as hopeful indications of the ways in which tourism might be transformed for social and ecological justice.

Practical implications – This conceptualisation could guide the industry to better stakeholder relations and sustainability.

Social implications – Socialising tourism offers a fruitful pathway to rethinking tourism through a reorientation of the social relations it fosters and thereby transforming its social impacts for the better.

Originality/value – This work engages with the novel concept of "socialising tourism". In connecting this new theory to the older theory of "tourism as a social force", this paper considers how COVID-19 has offered a possible transformative moment to enable more just and sustainable tourism futures.

Keywords *Tourism, Sustainable tourism, COVID-19, Socialising tourism, Tourism as a social force, Vaccine tourism*

Paper type *Research paper*

Introduction

As for the future, your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it (Antoine de Saint Exupéry)

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has been recognised as a possible game changer for globalisation as well as for global tourism; but the critical questions are in what ways and to whose benefit? COVID-19 caused a global pandemic that spread around the world from 2020 and resulted in the shutting of borders, the locking down of whole communities and the halting of international tourism. As we write this in the first half of 2021, new terms have entered our lexicon including "vaccine privilege" and "vaccine tourism". Vaccine privilege refers to the disturbing efforts of wealthier countries to access the vaccine for COVID-19 first without due care for poorer countries in vital need. Vaccine tourism refers to the actions of wealthy individuals to travel to

locations where they are able to more readily access the vaccine ahead of others. In response to this situation, the World Health Organization (WHO) Chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus stated: “I need to be blunt: the world is on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure—and the price of this failure will be paid with lives and livelihoods in the world’s poorest countries” (UN News, 2021). At this moment, probably mid-pandemic, it is timely to not only assess the vital need to socialise tourism for social and ecological justice but to also identify the barriers and possibilities of change within this historical moment.

To accomplish this, the article will briefly examine tourism pre-COVID and during COVID to better understand what the outcomes for tourism and indeed globalisation might be post-COVID. This is inspired by an Indigenous approach of seeing the past, present and future as interconnected and flowing. An articulation of this is evident in Haudenosaunee teachings as quoted in LaDuke: “We are a part of everything that is beneath us, above us and around us. Our past is our present, our present is our future, and our future is seven generations past and present” (2016, Intro., n.p.). Such an approach encourages us to think in terms of continuity, relationality and interconnection rather than anticipating abrupt changes (arguably the view of those expecting a tourism reset after COVID-19—see Lew, 2020). This Indigenous approach is also explored through a brief case study that brings Māori tourism perspectives from Aotearoa/New Zealand to the forefront. This is based on the recent work of Mika and Scheyvens (2022) who reported on three Māori tourism enterprises operating along the Te Awa Tupua/Whanganui River. The focus of this work is how Indigenous-led tourism better fosters peace, justice and sustainability. But for our purposes here, this work demonstrates how Indigenous tourism engagements can transform the very foundations of tourism by placing values and relations – including the total living environment, Indigenous (and other communities), traditional languages and Indigeneity – at the centre of tourism’s conceptualisation. This model of Indigenous tourism and the foundational values upon which it is based help us in not only re-thinking tourism by encouraging its capacity as a social force, but also approaching the concepts of economy-making and peace-making in different ways.

From early 2020, the COVID-19 crisis was widely seen as a potential moment of transformation (e.g. Roy, 2020). One articulation from the media explained: “Now, one form of unregulated, free-market globalization with its propensity for crises and pandemics is certainly dying. But another form that recognizes interdependence and the primacy of evidence-based collective action is being born” (Hutton, 2020). Because travel and tourism were arguably the hardest hit sectors globally in the crisis, transformational thinking was particularly evident in sections of tourism academia (see Lew, 2020). One group of tourism scholars argued that the crisis called into question the pro-growth approach to tourism:

The COVID-19 crisis should thus be seen as an opportunity to critically reconsider tourism’s growth trajectory, and to question the logic of more arrivals implying greater benefits. This may begin with a review of the positive outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic (Gössling *et al.*, 2021, pp. 13–14).

Responding to this call, the aim of this article is to weigh up the vital need for, the possibilities of and potential barriers to transformations in tourism. To achieve this, we turn to an older tourism conceptualisation of “tourism as a social force” and an emerging tourism theory “socialising tourism” to help guide the discussion.

Tourism and hospitality pre-COVID-19

Modern tourism began with Thomas Cook in England of the 1840s with a social purpose as its base (see Turner and Ash, 1975). Higgins-Desbiolles (2006) drew on this example and explained how tourism was developed to support human needs and social well-being and outlined a number of socially transformative examples of tourism. These roots of tourism, characterised by contributing to the social good, have largely been forgotten in the age of neoliberal global tourism where tourism is now seen as an industry and harnessed for private profit (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). While views of tourism as an industry have become hegemonic, commitment and action for tourism as a social force has continued. The latter has thrived mostly in the niche

sectors of tourism; however, certain forms such as social tourism do utilise mass tourism facilities to address issues of social inequality and marginalisation (see [de Almeida, 2011](#)).

Numerous analysts have been calling out the exploitation and damages of growth-focused forms of tourism which have been fostered under neoliberal capitalism (e.g. [Bianchi and de Man, 2021](#); [Fletcher, 2011](#); [Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018](#)). Overtourism was one symptom of the problem ([Goodwin, 2017](#)), as places as diverse as Venice, Barcelona, Reykjavík, Kyoto and Byron Bay in Australia have suffered social, cultural, environmental and/or economic problems from this phenomenon. This occurred because the tourism industry was under the influence of “pro-industry boosters” that set agendas on pushing through greater volumes of tourists in order to secure profits and meet growth targets. Local communities, so called “host communities”, were left to deal with the negative impacts, sparking social unrest that led to protesting, politically activating and building different approaches that positioned local communities at the centre of tourism planning and decision-making (see [Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020](#)).

Employment in the tourism and hospitality industries are too frequently characterised by low wages, casualisation, precarity and seasonality. Workers and their unions have had to resort to protests and strikes to try to address deteriorating labour conditions. For instance, in 2018 Unite Here represented some 7,700 workers in their strike against the Marriott Hotel chain in their demands for

1. wages high enough so that workers do not have to work multiple jobs to earn a living wage;
2. a voice in determining how much automation and what kind of automation makes its way into the hotel industry; and
3. better measures for workplace safety ([Ting, 2018](#)).

This raises a critical question: why has it been tolerated that tourism and hospitality workers often must hold down multiple jobs in order to eke out survival? Additionally, scandals concerning wage theft (through underpayment and unpaid overtime) and abusive working conditions have been exposed in countries such as Australia recently ([Dick, 2019](#)).

The cruise industry stands out as an icon of the damages of this corporatised form of tourism and hospitality. It has been indicted for its use of flags of convenience to avoid paying sufficient taxes, as well as to avoid rigorous environmental, labour and social regulations (see [Clancy, 2017](#)). The way in which cruise ships have contributed to overtourism in cities such as Venice, Barcelona and Dubrovnik is also indicative of how this has worked against the interests of local communities that have found their homes taken over by tourism, sometimes against their interests and well-being ([Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020](#)). This has sparked protests and opposition which has demonstrated that tolerance for the tourism status quo was under pressure ([Smith et al., 2019](#)).

The critics of these practices who come from academia, non-governmental organisations and the communities themselves have been left in a reactive state. Sometimes, they have found a seat at the table through corporate social responsibility and sustainability initiatives such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (see [Boluk et al., 2019](#)); however, they have been unable to get to the heart of the structures that cause the damages they protest. As a result, grave ecological damages result from tourism at both local and global scales, including climate change ([Becken et al., 2020](#)). Social, cultural and spiritual damages also occur through relentless commodification and imposition of tourism on communities in forms that they do not control and receive insufficient benefit from (e.g. [George and Reid, 2005](#)). This seemed to be an unstoppable trajectory until COVID-19 upended these practices.

Tourism and hospitality during COVID-19

COVID-19 has changed the way our world works completely from when it was declared a global pandemic on the 11 March 2020 ([World Health Organization, 2020](#)). It suspended taken for granted mobilities of people and goods as it spread through the channels of airports, cruise ships

and trains that enabled these flows. Faced with a stark choice between public health requirements and the need to keep service industries operating, governments around the world shut down borders, blocked tourists and told people to shelter in place at home under officially declared lockdowns (Hall *et al.*, 2020).

As a result, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis was devastating in its impacts on travel and tourism, as well as the hospitality, arts and events affiliated sectors. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has estimated up to an 80% decline in international tourism in 2020, a possible US\$1.2 trillion loss in tourism export revenues and a risk of up to 120 million direct tourism jobs (UNWTO, 2020). But more importantly, hundreds of thousands of people have died, numerous others incapacitated and health systems overwhelmed. In addressing the crisis, we also have found that care workers and service workers, including nurses, teachers, grocery store clerks and gig economy delivery drivers were the ones whose work was declared essential as we relied on them to help us stay safe from the pandemic. It is not a small point to note that women, People of Colour [1] and migrants are the ones that predominate in these jobs that not coincidentally are also frequently low-paid, precarious and subject to poor working conditions. Such a momentous event as COVID-19 has opened up the possibility of this new consciousness leading to profound transformations. As a report from Deloitte Access Economics (2020, p. 2) noted, we have witnessed “social connectedness on a global scale” as individuals, communities and nations have realised the need for social supports to weather the social and economic crises the pandemic has caused.

The crisis has spotlighted how polarised neoliberal societies have become, starkly illuminating the haves, the have-nots and the uber-elite who have actually profited during this global disaster (Rogers, 2020). Worldwide, the wealth of billionaires increased by \$US3.9 trillion between 18 March and 31 December 2020 (Khadem, 2021). Some have noted that in the crisis, not everyone had a home to shelter in and not everyone could work from home. Thus, the crisis caused a moment of critical questioning as public health requirements reminded us that we are not in fact individual consumers but rather members of communities that depend on social bonds and considerations of the common good. This led to tangible outcomes, including states such as Australia spending millions of dollars to shelter people experiencing homelessness in hotels (Pawson and Parsell, 2020).

However, writing this in the middle of the crisis, it is clear that this revival of the social is not uncontested. For instance, historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz analysed the industry push to re-open the economy quickly as a way to prevent demands for social change:

The capitalist class, those who benefit most from the unequal system, they know it's not sustainable. They're desperate not to stay locked down too long, so people get used to fresh air, breathing air without carbon in it. People might get ideas of a different kind of world (cited in Beckett, 2020).

In addition to these reimaginings of the social, the human relationship with nature was also brought into stark relief. Reports featured in social media of how animals returned to cities, the lagoons of Venice ran clean and nature restored itself in multiple ways in the absence of humans under COVID lockdowns. In fact, Visit Auckland authorities used these facts in their communications campaign with a short video “Papatūānuku (our Earth mother) is breathing” (Visit Auckland, 2020). Krishnamurthi noted:

A video that celebrates the silence of our biggest city in the Covid-19 lockdown has become the biggest ever global hit on the Visit Auckland YouTube channel—218,940 view at last count.

Papatūānuku is breathing, narrated by 11-year-old Manawanui Maniapoto Mills, pans across Auckland's natural landscapes as human activity almost stops during the lockdown.

Stop, listen, Papatūānuku, the Earth mother, is breathing, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland is still, it begins (2020).

Crossley (2020) has explored these phenomena as an expression of ecological grief among many people in our global community. Her analysis suggested this can be viewed as “[. . .] a motif of environmental hope that symbolises life, regeneration and resilience, the understanding of which

may contribute to the project of hopeful tourism in the post-COVID-19 era” (2020, p. 536). Thus, we see that despite all of the struggles and negativities of the global pandemic crisis, the seeds of possibilities of doing tourism differently have emerged in a more forceful and realistic way.

Tourism and hospitality post-COVID-19?

The premise of this article is that the past, present and future are interconnected. It is currently clear that the focus of most tourism industry leaders is recovery and returning to “business as usual” as soon as possible. Leaders of airlines, cruise industry and tourism corporations have been hoping for a share of large government bailout packages (Keating, 2020) or access to government funds allocated for small businesses and workers’ safety nets (Martin and Remeikis, 2020). In industry media responses and press releases, there is a clear emphasis on getting back to normal quickly and keeping consumer interest up. For instance, Roger Dow of the US Travel Association stated: “Over the long term we will return and come back to business as usual. People have short memories and there will be a pent up desire to travel” (Becker, 2020).

However, those committed to transformative thinking for tourism futures as a result of the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis are anticipating a break with the past and a break with business as usual (e.g. Lew, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Ateljevic, 2020; Crossley, 2020). There are numerous ideas and proposals being advocated. This includes work by Everingham and Chassagne (2020) that called to abandon growth approaches and to consider more sustainable tourism paradigms as found in movements such as *Buen Vivir*. Benjamin, Dillette and Alderman advocated “tourism transformation must bring an actionable focus on equity” (2020, p. 476). Cave and Dredge (2020) advocated regenerative tourism approaches based on sound thinking from regenerative economics (see also, Pollock, 2019). Higgins-Desbiolles proposed the concept of socialising tourism which meant “[. . .]to make tourism responsive and answerable to the society in which it occurs” (2020, p. 617); she argued this was necessary to better secure social and ecological justice. Such optimistic, even utopian thinking is challenged by those that either think such transformations are unlikely or even undesirable. In the former category is the example of Hall *et al.* (2020) who stated change may occur in specific locations, but the “juggernaut that is international tourism will roll on” (p. 591). In the category of the latter is Butcher (2020) who championed industry recovery and a swift return to business as usual. Considering Higgins-Desbiolles’ response to Butcher’s analysis in the article entitled “The war over tourism”, it is also clear the hegemonic struggle to define the future of tourism has become increasingly polarised (see Butcher, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021).

This article seeks to revive the early work on “tourism as a social force” and connect it to the idea of how we might socialise tourism. COVID-19 offers a chance to turn away from the hegemony asserted by profit-driven market forces and return to an earlier vision of tourism as a social force, connecting people, fostering greater well-being and fulfilling wider promises beyond only market exchange (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). The concept of “socialising tourism” offers a chance to return to the true values of hospitality and build vital bridges between tourists and local communities that might help eradicate the animosity that has appeared in recent years, particularly in sites of extreme overtourism. But the vision for socialising tourism offered by Higgins-Desbiolles also recognised the ongoing need to call out structural injustices in tourism and advance just forms of tourism practice so that it no longer perpetuates dispossession, exploitation, inequity and marginalisation. She suggested re-orienting tourism to serve the “public good”, protecting the “commons” from further encroachment, regulating tourism to bring it under control and better justifying the use of scarce resources in tourism by requiring government resources to only be used to support public good forms of tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles *et al.*, 2021).

The dismissal of such work as utopian or even as “anti-industry” is mistaken. The seeds of such transformation are already apparent. For example, the Peace Boat, a Japanese peace organisation, has used the tool of the mass tourism cruise ship in its efforts to spread a global

message of peace (Peace Boat, n.d.; Tatsuya, 2013). It has undertaken a number of global voyages since its original vision to address the legacy of Japanese militarism in the Pacific and to foster peace and reconciliation (see Blanchard *et al.*, 2022). Peace Boat's 103rd voyage occurred in January 2020 and was focused on the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN); ICAN won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 and is steadily advancing support on a new Treaty to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (Peace Boat, 2020). Peace Boat leaders are committed to building their own ecoship rather than leasing a conventional and problematic cruise ship as they currently do; they envision it will be the "planet's most environmentally sustainable cruise ship" (Ecoship, n.d.). Peace Boat underscores that the phenomenon of tourism is by no means limited to the corporate sector with its profit motivations that we have been recently attuned to focus on; it is much more than that, as the Peace Boat demonstrates (see also Yamashita, 2021). The dominance of pro-industry advocates (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021) has worked to make us inattentive to these essential facets of tourism.

Aotearoa/New Zealand is a country that might be important to watch in this process of tracking transformative possibilities. For instance, the 2018 Tiaki Promise campaign was informed by Māori values of custodianship and developed in consultation with Māori Tourism NZ; "it encourages commitment to caring for the environment for present and future generations" (Carr, 2020, p. 495). In addition, the Aotearoa/New Zealand Tourism Task Force Interim Report (2020) has embarked on a well-being agenda rather than the more typical tourism growth focus of most nations. This report sets a broad goal of "enriching Aotearoa" which is defined with this vision:

Nourishing people and place. Enlivening communities and culture. We are here to nurture this place, enriching generations with livelihoods, experiences and stories to share. We must own the impact of our actions and enable Aotearoa New Zealand to thrive by giving back more than we take (2020, pp. 31–32).

The transformative moment opened up by the COVID-19 crisis may in fact be an important opportunity to reincorporate earlier understandings of the value of tourism. We might thereby ensure that we reclaim it for greater diversity, a more broad and even distribution of benefits and more sustainable outcomes that enhance the natural environment. Aotearoa/New Zealand seems to be a country to watch because it is engaging with the richness of Indigenous perspectives and values which move us beyond industry utilitarianism and its concerns with profits and growth.

Te Awa Tupua and transformed visions of tourism: Māori case studies from Aotearoa/New Zealand

In their article that takes the name of the Whanganui River, "Te Awa Tupua: peace, justice and sustainability through Indigenous tourism" (2021), Mika and Scheyvens present case studies of Māori tourism initiatives located along this river flowing through the heart of the North Island in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Highlighting the importance of the 2017 recognition of the legal personhood of the Whanganui River, the authors show how this allows alternative economy-making and peace-making that is aligned with Māori values.

The case studies presented include the Unique Whanganui River Experience and Whanganui River Adventures which are two private, family-owned Māori tourism enterprises. In describing their approaches to tourism and the experiences they offer, the operators of both of these private enterprises emphasised that their focus and motivations are guided by spiritual and cultural connections with the river. For Josephine of Whanganui River Adventures, a deliberate focus in the family tourism business is on "quality, not quantity, and culture" (cited in Mika and Scheyvens, 2022, p. 10), an approach that has led to their own strict restrictions on the number of visitors each day to minimise impact on the water, land and cultural resources.

The third case study focused on the Te Ao Hou Marae led by similar objectives that prioritise caring for and connecting with the river, the land, traditional stories and culture. This tourism initiative is one that is communally owned by the local *hapu*. Motivations for operating the tourism activities are not only to share traditional cultural stories and experiences of the river with visitors but also to

utilise tourism as a way to restore the *marae* (the traditional meeting place) and the Indigenous sense of community that is embedded within it. Thus, the community enterprise is empowered through the vehicle of tourism to both share its stories and cultural connections with the river to the outside world of visitors while simultaneously harnessing tourism activities towards the ends of strengthening local hapu, or local Māori peoples' engagement with the marae, the river, traditional culture and Indigenous ways of being in relationship with these forces.

For all three of the case studies presented, a traditional Māori proverb “ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au” encapsulates the foundational ethos informing not only local Indigenous approaches to the river, traditional culture and community-building but also guides the priorities of tourism planning, management and sharing of natural resources and culture. This proverb translates in English to “I am the river and the river is me” (cited in [Mika and Scheyvens, 2022](#), p. 11). When this thinking is allowed to guide tourism activities and economic engagement, new possibilities are created that disrupt and shift the potential of tourism and transform it in fundamental ways. The work by [Mika and Scheyvens \(2022\)](#) indicates the potential of socialising tourism for greater social and ecological justice, in this case by giving precedence to Māori values and culture in tourism business rather than socialising Māori operators to pursue only conventional growth and profit motives in their engagement with tourism.

Using the experience of COVID-19 to forecast the future trajectory of tourism?

Change in the trajectory of tourism is not a given in a post-COVID world. In fact, we must actively enable change if we wish to secure such transformations (as per the opening epigraph by de Saint Exupéry). The revival of the social, the revaluing of community bonds and access to nature, and the willingness of governments around the world (even those of decidedly neoliberal values) to spend vast sums of money to cushion society from the pandemic's social and economic fallout did inspire great optimism. But the pandemic also added new words to our common lexicon, including “vaccine privilege” and “vaccine tourism”.

As the pandemic caused a global crisis in 2020, several large transnational pharmaceutical corporations competed to develop vaccines that could ameliorate the effects of COVID-19 in record time. While the WHO tried to manage the global pandemic through a system for equitable sharing of the vaccines globally, wealthy countries struck confidential deals with these pharmaceutical companies to secure vaccines for their own populations. The term that was coined to describe this was “vaccine privilege.” Even leadership such as that of the European Union, known for a more internationalist worldview, succumbed to it: “The reaction in Europe, at least outwardly, has been to pull up the drawbridge and ‘secure the fortress’” ([Nebe, 2021](#)). It was reported that, “even though rich nations represent just 14% of the world's population, they have bought up 53% of the most promising vaccines so far” through private deals and that such “hoarding” of vaccines will mean billions of people around the world will lack access to vaccines “. . . for years to come” ([BBC, 2020](#)). This is a clear sign of nationalistic political reasoning impeding sound economic reason as the [International Chamber of Commerce \(n.d.\)](#) reported that such hoarding could in fact cost the global economy some US\$9.2 trillion, indicating sharing the vaccine globally is not just a moral imperative but an economic one ([Cakmakli et al., 2021](#)). As a counter to the injustices of this, the WHO has created the Covax initiative promising to deliver “2 billion doses fairly by the end of 2021” ([WHO, n.d.](#)) and the People's Vaccine Alliance has been formed from a network of organisations including Amnesty International, Oxfam and Global Justice Now ([BBC, 2020](#)).

Another term that entered our vocabulary during the COVID era is “vaccine tourism”. This describes the more individualistic action to access the vaccine preferentially based on wealth and privilege. On 27 January 2021, it was reported that Canadian casino executive Rodney Baker and his wife flew to a remote community in the Yukon Territory and posed as locals to receive vaccines meant for the Indigenous White River First Nation ([Cecco, 2021](#)). Organised vaccine tourism is also evident through domestic travel in the US and international travel to states such the United Arab Emirates, India and Cuba ([Loss, 2021](#)). Unfortunately, this dynamic suggests the use of tourism for

tourists' selfish consumption and for industry profits will be resistant to transformation in the interests of social responsibility and public good.

As noted in the introduction to this article, in response to the situation of assertion of vaccine privilege, WHO Chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus stated: "I need to be blunt: the world is on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure. . ." (UN News, 2021). In a world where existential crisis is now very real, such a moral failure is a setback for those that hope for a future based on cooperation, sharing, equity and justice. This pandemic is just the first of many coming crises which are due to unsustainable demands that humans place on our finite Earth. These crises are escalating and compounding. As Becken (2021) noted:

With each passing day, the grave future of Earth becomes more stark. The disruption of COVID-19 has not been enough to shift the trajectory, nor has it prompted polluting sectors of the economy to reconsider the harms they inflict on the planet (2021).

In recent years, extraordinary warnings have been issued by scientists that the world is on a dangerous pathway. For instance, in 2018 scientists explored the possibilities that human-induced climate change is leading us on a pathway to "hothouse Earth": "If the threshold is crossed, the resulting trajectory would likely cause serious disruptions to ecosystems, society, and economies" (Steffen *et al.*, 2018, p. 8252). More recently, British naturalist David Attenborough presented to the United Nations Security Council arguing "climate change is the biggest security threat ever faced by modern humans" and that cooperation on an extraordinary scale is essential (SBS News, 2021).

In these circumstances, the concepts of "tourism as a social force" and "socialising tourism" must go mainstream and break their confinements in niche markets. Tourism is one of the forces connecting us as peoples around the world and we need to harness its capacities for building community, solidarity and a vision for international citizenship. The recent phenomena of vaccine privilege and vaccine tourism underscore in stark relief the disparities and deadly inequities that come from perpetuating and prolonging selfish, materialistic individualism. Our future survival rests on transitioning from narrow nationalism, relentless consumerism and exploitative capitalism. Tourism has a role to play in guiding us through this transition with its social capacities to connect people to people and people to place. This is not just an ethical musing; it is increasingly imperative. Nations such as Aotearoa/New Zealand demonstrate the political will and commitment that is needed to enable just forms of tourism in a post-COVID era.

Conclusion

Arundhati Roy (2020, n.p.) stated:

Whatever it is, coronavirus has made the mighty kneel and brought the world to a halt like nothing else could. Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to "normality", trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists. And in the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality.

It can be argued that tourism under free-market capitalism has been a significant facet of what Roy calls a "doomsday machine". This is in part why a number of scholars were quick to act on a call to contemplate transforming tourism in the COVID-19 moment. Tourism has been the subject of criticism from academia, NGOs and communities for decades for the reasons outlined here. The recent phenomenon of overtourism has suggested that the time was overripe to address tourism's deficiencies and rethink it (Higgins-Desbiolles *et al.*, 2019).

In the wake of COVID-19, we have a moment in which to consider what future we want to enable. Business as usual in tourism has been marked by the dominance of the industry to the detriment of earlier visions of tourism that were engaged with the social capacities of tourism. The social solidarity and community bonds that societies around the world have relied on to address the pandemic point to a possible future where we revive this earlier vision. Higgins-Desbiolles (2020, p. 618) recently conceptualised this as "socialising tourism" which she described as "[. . .] a call to place tourism in the context of the society in which it occurs and to harness it for the empowerment and

wellbeing of local communities". Socialising tourism requires tourism to serve society rather than the other way around.

COVID-19's global disruption has brought us to a moment when we can envision what was previously thought to be impossible. It is certainly not a given that such a transformation will occur. On the one hand, barriers to change remain clear: entrenched neoliberal ideologies of growth and expansion continue to define the "recovery" discourse for the industry. On the other hand, the activities of Aotearoa/New Zealand show us alternatives are possible. The legal personhood of rivers and the transformed approaches to tourism that result from such structural changes show us new opportunities are possible in a post-COVID world. As this discussion has demonstrated, if our goal is greater social and ecological sustainability for more equitable and just futures, COVID-19's interruption invites us to look to tourism's past to help us in our imaginings to enable a better future.

Note

1. The appropriate term for non-privileged, non-white people is debated and differs in different contexts. In the US, People of Colour (POC) and Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) have been used, while in the UK Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) has been used. As Kim (2020) argued effectively, the key issues are rights of and solidarity with people across the intersections of injustice.

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