

DESTINATION CONSCIENCE

*Seeking Meaning and Purpose
in the Travel Experience*

Edited by

HARALD PECHLANER

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NEW PERSPECTIVES IN TOURISM
AND HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT

Destination Conscience

NEW PERSPECTIVES IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT



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Destination Conscience: Seeking Meaning and Purpose in the Travel Experience

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Rethinking Mass Tourism: Embracing Destination Conscience as a Guiding Approach

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Destination Conscience: A Corrective for Sustainable Tourism

Against the backdrop of numerous ongoing socio-ecological crises, a comprehensive reassessment of all economic sectors is necessary, and mass tourism is no exception. Mass tourism is nowadays often negatively connotated, however, it is not a negative thing in principle. The central challenge lies in reconciling tourism with the preservation of ecosystems and local communities while respecting the physical and social boundaries of our biosphere. To do so, several challenges emerge, such as managing substantial volumes of visitors, and understanding how to meet their needs, minimising the consequential damage associated with travelling. Last but not least: it is about the provider's view of tourism and how guests should behave in a sustainable manner, with regards to the local residents and hosts. Mass tourism is ostensibly about capacities: how many guests can find suitable accommodation in a destination, how many guests is a destination able to provide accommodation for in a given time? Is mass tourism capable of more than just 'flooding' destinations with masses of guests? Is there such a thing as sustainable mass tourism? [Weaver \(2015\)](#) has identified at least two factors that facilitate a transformation of mass tourism into sustainable mass tourism: firstly, effective governance in terms of monitoring and certifying sustainability is needed. Secondly, the prospect of reducing quantitative growth in favour of certain qualities, particularly the quality of encounters and the quality of relationships between guest and host, must be entertained. Once people have more time for one another again, empathy can develop, which in turn can lead to guests

Destination Conscience, 1–14



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and hosts reflecting thoroughly on their experiences and enable an evolution towards tourism with a certain quality. The frequently overlooked relational aspect in the context of mass tourism assumes paramount importance in our discussion. The experience of otherness is indeed a primordial need that travel fulfills, and many chapters in this book delve into it by examining its spiritual, ethical, and emotional dimensions. Understood as a caring and empathetic relationship toward both human and non-human others, it may be a useful interpretive key for a new model of sustainable tourism.

These are the standards of a development towards a form of tourism that basically everybody wishes for, namely a form of tourism that makes it possible for everyone to shape their travel in a way that suits them, or for everyone to travel in the way that you would like others to visit you (Monshausen, 2023). People who think in this way and follow this principle while travelling have an awareness of sustainability, which could act as a kind of regulator for responsible travel. It is responsible because travellers voluntarily set standards of responsibility, but it is also responsible because, as part of the bigger picture, everyone can contribute to create a sort of conscience in a destination that can then act as a benchmark of actions for hosts and guests alike. But because this benchmark of actions is not always present, inequalities and injustices arise, which consequentially, at the very least, raise questions about the current prevailing model of tourism, or in many cases, fight fiercely against it. If a stronger sense of responsibility cannot be established in a destination via the service offering provided by the hosts, responsible tourism becomes merely a small pinprick in the flesh of mass tourism. If the climate-conscious composition of the value chain cannot be established because of a lack of awareness, restorative and regenerative tourism can only emerge from a small circle of people who are convinced of their ideas and have the conviction to break with tradition and establish a new way. On the one hand, it is a discussion about decoupling quantitative growth and resource consumption within planetary boundaries; on the other hand, it is about the gradual development of restorative tourism with the potential to become a larger movement. Thus, new forms of tourism will develop out of the niche and thereby change the current standards of 'mass tourism', i.e. a tourism offer that is accepted as a standard by broad target groups. All of this contributes to punching holes in the massive armour of mass tourism, transforming it into a kind of sustainable mass tourism that is capable of taming itself and allows for alternative ways of development. That is the point: permitting incremental developments inside a homogeneous development model. Hence, in the end, there are two perspectives: firstly, the perspective that mass tourism carries the potential of willingness to change and secondly, the perspective of alternative tourism, which, viewed autonomously, enables an innovative form of experience.

Issues of fairness and inequality play a critical role. Reducing inequalities to foster equality of opportunity is an imperative of political, economic and social action. This does not mean equality in the sense of a monotonous offer. Equality does not imply the emergence of a uniform target group for a highly standardised product; on the contrary, digitalisation allows for 'mass customisation', in the sense of providing the possibility of taking individual particularities into account when creating tourist offerings. Questions of fairness, on the other hand, go even

deeper and are always intertwined with questions of dependencies. An emblematic example is that of resorts in countries of the Global South that provide jobs and, within a certain framework, add value to the region but create dependencies from, for example, corporate structures at the same time.

Current tourism seems to be a long way from having a high standard of sustainability, at least, from the form of sustainability needed to find answers for prominent problems related to tourism development. Key challenges related to tourism are issues of strategic regional development, offering the possibility of earning a living wage to as many residents as possible and establishing an overall well-functioning balance between the interests of the service providers and the interests, identity and core values of the local population. Additional issues concern appreciation and performance-based remuneration for employees in the tourism sector, a question that has recently taken on new dimensions, because, due to the current demographic crisis, hardly anyone is interested in working in the hotel and restaurant industry under traditional conditions. The tourism sector should be the pioneer for climate-friendly travel, since finding concrete solutions for challenges of mobility and traffic and, even more so, working on a comprehensive vision for the tourism industry as a whole is critical. This evolution presents a challenge for the development of products and experiences. The perception of overtourism, a diffuse feeling of dissatisfaction with the development of tourism among large sections of the population in a certain region or city, often leads to visitor flow control measures in the destinations. These measures are undoubtedly a step in the right direction towards getting these problems under control for the time being. But visitor flow control measures rarely address the real problem, which is trying to figure out what type of tourism one actually wants in any given region or city.

Destination Conscience is rooted first and foremost in the ability and willingness of individuals and actors in the destination to engage in critical and reflective thinking: to be reflexive in the light of enormous issues arising from a multitude of crises, which have a corresponding influence on questions of regional and living environment development. Reflection is a prerequisite to enable rethinking in the tourism industry and to establish questions of sustainability and fairness as a benchmark. The conscience, hence, describes the setting of common values as a guard rail for rethinking the existing offer or for setting the direction of development by defining new set of goals. Participation creates a network that, by means of reflection, acquires a minimum dimension of convictions for certain actions and directions. Tourism is a form of industry whose special characteristic is offering people distraction and diversion. Asking deep questions is not a part of this. This factor makes reflection difficult, unless one remains sensitive to questions of social developments and relies on the inner voice, which is in essence the result of constant searching and questioning that is guided by values. Hence, the destination's conscience is assembled by the conscience of all stakeholders who successfully manage to create acceptance and consensus in the destination and can become a corrective contributing to the development of sustainability in the destination. Overtourism, fair remuneration, business practices and climate challenges are all exemplary issues whose solutions require a conscience that can only be found beyond the commonly accepted goals of sustainability. Destination

Conscience is necessary to set priorities in the sustainability agenda and to mitigate conflicting goals in pursuit of a necessary balance.

Destination Conscience: From Mass Tourism to Sustainable Mass Tourism

The future of tourism is characterised by a strong focus on sustainability, authenticity and personalised experiences (OECD, 2022; Olbrich et al., 2022). Mass tourism as it currently exists will increasingly be replaced by more sustainable and responsible approaches that focus on environmental protection, social harmony and cultural authenticity. Travellers will increasingly seek destinations that are environmentally friendly and focus on positive impacts on local communities. There will be increased demand for, for example, sustainable accommodation, environmentally friendly transportation, ethically produced products and local cuisine. Digitalisation and technology will play a pivotal role. On one hand, the internet and social media will foster enduring relationships between hosts and guests beyond the constraints of physical distance. On the other, the integration of virtual reality and artificial intelligence will enable the creation of customised and immersive travel experiences. At the same time, respect for cultural diversity and appreciation of heritage will play an important role (Cerquetti & Romagnoli, 2022; Salameh et al., 2022). Tourism of the future will thus be based on a balanced and responsible approach that considers the needs of travellers as well as those of the environment and local communities. What is important here is that choices are made and actions are taken to address the environmental, social and cultural negative impacts of tourism and to encourage responsible tourism (Anwar & Hamilton, 2005). In this regard, 'Destination Conscience' in particular plays a central role. Destination Conscience refers to the moral and ethical awareness of a destination region with regard to sustainability, social responsibility or the protection of the environment and culture. It includes the destination's efforts to promote environmentally friendly practices, engage and empower the local community, preserve cultural heritage and create positive impacts on society. It focuses on promoting conscious and responsible tourism practices that benefit travellers, locals and the environment (Pechlaner & Olbrich, 2023).

Finally, from the perspective of research, both the operators and the travellers have a special role to play in the future development of tourism. This will now be analysed in more detail.

Examining the Supply Side of Tourism: Unveiling Perspectives and Strategies

The future role of tourism stakeholders and providers will be shaped by the need to promote sustainable practices and meet the expectations of travellers in order to promote the evolution towards Destination Conscience. According to Calzada (2019), in order to take all the stakeholders into account, different groups need to be involved in decision-making processes: the public sector, the private sector,

civil society and academia. In particular, the role of governments and tourism authorities should be mentioned. They should create frameworks that promote sustainable practices, support the protection of the environment and culture and promote the development of quality tourism rather than mass tourism. Creating sustainable tourism strategies, promoting education and awareness of sustainable tourism and working with various stakeholders are essential tasks for governments (OECD, 2022). Likewise, tourism businesses and associations must assume their responsibilities and integrate sustainable practices into their operations. Tourism associations can play an active role by encouraging their members to adopt sustainable measures, share best practices and provide training. At the same time, tourism businesses need to focus not only on the well-being of guests but also more importantly on the well-being of employees (Alagarsamy et al., 2020). They must value their activities and efforts and care for them, accordingly. The involvement and inclusion of local communities and indigenous peoples in the tourism process should also not be ignored. Recognition of their rights, protection of their cultural heritage and inclusion in decision-making processes are critical. By promoting community-based tourism, local habitat can directly benefit from the economic advantages of tourism and cultural identity can be preserved (Bowen & Sotomayor, 2022; Herntrei & Tsvilik, 2022). Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play an important role in promoting sustainable tourism (Thees et al., 2020). They can act as catalysts for change by creating awareness, implementing projects, supporting capacity development and working in partnerships with other stakeholders. NGOs can also help monitor and assess the impact of tourism and work to protect the environment and local communities. Finally, technology companies have the potential to revolutionise the tourism sector and promote sustainable practices. By developing innovative solutions such as online booking platforms for sustainable accommodation, intelligent transportation systems and digital information platforms, they can help travellers make conscious choices and improve their travel experience (Verma et al., 2022).

This means that the role of tourism stakeholders and providers requires comprehensive cooperation, coordination and commitment in order to build a sustainable and responsible tourism industry. A destination must be seen as a whole, and all stakeholders (e.g. politics, society or tourism businesses) must be involved in order to develop an overall strategy (Byrd, 2007; Tribe & Paddison, 2023). Building a common set of values for the entire destination and finding an identity as a destination is essential. By integrating sustainability into all aspects of tourism, the tourism sector can become a driving force for protecting the environment, promoting social justice and preserving cultural values.

Empowering Travellers: The Future Role of Sustainable Tourism and Responsible Travel in Shaping the Demand Side

The future role of travellers in tourism will be characterised by a growing awareness of sustainability, cultural respect and social responsibility. Travellers

will increasingly question their motivation to travel. They must be able to identify with the values a destination stands for and represents. For this reason, there will be a greater search for authentic and meaningful travel experiences where travellers can make a personal impact (e.g. slow tourism) (Huang et al., 2023). One of the key changes will be the increased emphasis on sustainable travel (OECD, 2022). Travellers will prioritise environmentally friendly modes of transportation such as rail, bicycle or electric vehicles. They will seek to minimise the environmental footprint of their travels by, for example, paying attention to energy-efficient accommodations, conserving water, reducing waste and supporting local products. Sustainable travellers will choose destinations that are committed to protecting nature, such as nature reserves or sustainable tourism initiatives (Burbano et al., 2022; OECD, 2022). Respect for cultural diversity and local traditions will also play a greater role in the future. Travellers will seek to respect and preserve the cultural heritage of the places they visit. They will prioritise quality over quantity. They will value local customs and traditions and strive to connect with locals and better understand their culture. The focus will be on exchange and mutual enrichment rather than superficial consumption. In particular, travellers will seek the moral and ethical awareness of a destination (in the narrower sense of Destination Conscience). Travellers will also take greater responsibility for their own behaviour. They will be aware of how their actions affect the environment, local community and cultural heritage. They will be informed and respectful, for example, by protecting sensitive ecosystems, supporting local businesses and being considerate of local norms and values (Spantig, 2022). The role of travellers will also be influenced by technological developments (Ozdemir et al., 2023; Sampaio et al., 2023). The use of digital platforms and social media will enable travellers to share information about sustainable travel options, find responsible suppliers and increase their knowledge about sustainable tourism.

Overall, the future role of travellers in tourism will be characterised by making conscious choices and initiating positive change. Travellers have the power to influence the tourism sector by, for example, supporting sustainable practices, strengthening local communities and promoting environmental protection and avoiding certain forms of travel (e.g. mass tourism). Through responsible and respectful behaviour, they can contribute to the sustainable and positive development of tourism.

Chapters of This Book

The book opens with three insightful interviews with experts in the respective fields of philosophy, anthropology and theology. These conversations aim to bridge the understanding of conscience across various disciplines and establish its relevance to the tourism context. *Alberto Giubilini* offers philosophical insights into the historical evolution of the concept of conscience, the inner voice coming from some internalised figure, tracing its roots and conceptual nuances. This inner voice, which is the set of moral beliefs and emotions that shape our personal

identity and sense of morality, originates from influences, such as education, upbringing or religious traditions, and plays a crucial role in our decision-making process. Giubolini highlights that while conscience is subjective, our morality is inevitably influenced by societal and cultural factors: as social beings, our moral compass is shaped by the norms and values of our social groups. In the context of tourism destinations, a conscientious destination is one that strives to preserve its cultural identity and core values. This entails respecting the local values and norms, both for inhabitants and economic stakeholders who should prioritise the place's identity over financial gain. Moreover, conscientious destinations appeal to tourists who appreciate local cultures, cultural differences and value cultural identity.

In the second interview, anthropological perspectives on conscience and conscientious destinations are discussed. *Michael Volgger* highlights the connection between consciousness and conscience, with consciousness involving reflection and conscience relating to moral judgement, and underlies how both are necessary if we want to shape change and transformation. According to the French *conscience collective*, our moral compass is shared within our society and is closely linked to collective values. For the author, a shared conscience to empower reflection on alternative tourism models is required to promote collective awareness and prevent harmful tourism practices. Local stakeholders in particular play a key role, as they have the power to encourage collective reflection on what type of tourism is to be desired. Destinations should then educate tourists by soliciting conscience and consciousness, shaping and encouraging a transformative energy.

From a Christian theological perspective, *Guido Perathoner* highlights the close connection between conscience and the image of God within humanity, functioning as a sensorium that motivates righteous behaviour. Perathoner proposes that destinations can cultivate a conscience by engaging in sincere and comprehensive reflection on their actions, involving the local community, and giving importance to the human and cultural dimensions of tourism. The notion of 'Destination Conscience' ultimately refers to the creation of a vibrant and inclusive 'living space', where all segments of the population contribute to shaping the tourism offerings and determining the future trajectory of their respective destinations. The interplay between values and conscience is crucial, necessitating a delicate equilibrium between excess and deficiency. Sustainability, in this context, emerges as a corrective concept that guides us towards purposeful actions. Perathoner concludes by stressing that the quest for conscience in tourism destinations demands genuine introspection and a willingness to undergo self-examination and inner growth.

Beyond these short introductory interviews, 'Destination Conscience' brings together a collection of diverse contributions that delve into the theoretical foundations, practical applications and implications of conscience within tourism destinations.

The fourth chapter of the book, 'Unleashing the "Wind of Thought": Paving the Way towards Conscientious and Humane Tourism Destinations' traces the evolution of the concepts of humaneness and conscience, establishing their

significance as the conceptual framework for the entire volume. Drawing particular inspiration from Hannah Arendt's interpretation of Socrates's philosophy, *Giulia Isetti* delves into the vital role of education, knowledge and meaningful encounters in cultivating humaneness and conscience within the tourism industry. The chapter underlines in particular the potential and responsibility of tourism higher education in empowering students to become agents for systemic transformation by unlocking the power of critical thinking and unleashing the 'wind of thought'. By equipping future practitioners and managers with the tools to challenge established norms and envision alternative futures, tourism higher education can play a pivotal role in shaping a more conscientious and humane industry. Furthermore, there is a need for the tourism industry, governments and other organisations to promote frameworks of shared 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 of values and encouraging critical thinking within this framework to allow for a dynamic and iterative process of testing and reconsidering these rules to ensure their effectiveness and relevance. Finally, the 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.

Elena Cavagnaro's contribution, 'Looking at Tourists through the Lens of Aristotelian Friendship – On Altruism in Tourism', discusses beliefs on human nature and addresses altruism and its role in tourism, intertwining ideas about human nature from ancient philosophy and modern science, particularly Aristotle, socio-biology and environmental psychology. Cavagnaro claims that the widespread dismal belief that tourists are self-centred, fun-driven, cheating individuals should be challenged, as altruism is not the prerogative of few but is hardwired in all of us. Indeed, if we understand human beings as capable of friendships of goodwill, a purer form of friendship felt for others for their own sake, then the system that we call tourism may start changing towards a more sensitive, human and sustainable path. The chapter finally claims that the new opportunities arising from the internet and social media can help us in removing barriers to the full deployment of altruism, such as the limited amount of time that modern tourists spend in a destination.

In his contribution 'Heritage and Destination Conscience: Empowering Communities and Enhancing Tourism Experiences', *Dallen J. Timothy* explores the issue of overtourism and the prevailing mass-tourism model, which traditionally focuses on the most tangible, extraordinary and ancient heritage sites. The author argues that heritage tourism – when it leverages sustainably on the past to develop the present socio-economic well-being – has the potential to empower communities and foster solidarity in shaping a Destination Conscience. The contribution describes how four different manifestations of heritage can contribute to the political, social, psychological and economic empowerment of communities, meaningful touristic encounters and the cultivation of Destination Conscience. Communities' empowerment and Destination Conscience are allowed and reinforced by several manifestations of heritage – among them, local