

Towards understanding and managing the politics of tourism in a crisis-challenged world

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ABSTRACT

This article offers an overview of the literature and state of knowledge on the politics of tourism. While the politics of tourism remains an under studied topic in tourism academia, here we argue political analyses are vital for advancing our understanding of the deep-rooted dynamics of tourism and how we respond to arising crises.

We analyze the interface between tourism and politics, briefly outline key contemporary issues and introduce some new vistas for future inquiries. The foundation of the politics of tourism is a search for the good life and critical questions arise including democratic participation, neoliberalizing forces and possibility of diverse worldviews challenging neoliberal domination. This article serves as an introduction to a curated collection.

1. Introduction

Tourism is worthy of serious analysis for its worldmaking and transformative capacities (Swain, 2009). This article offers an overview of the literature and state of knowledge on the politics of tourism, recognizing its vital importance for advancing our understanding of the deep-rooted dynamics of tourism and how it shapes our world. This is particularly so at a time when politics and its analogue, democracy, have been hollowed out by decades of neoliberal attacks on the social-democratic state and chronic economic crises, the latter resulting in ever-increasing state bailouts to protect investors from financial losses at the expense of living standards (Streeck, 2014). Meanwhile, in tandem with the marketization of citizenship, the locus of power itself has increasingly shifted away from the political-institutional realm to an opaque, digitized and networked corporate sphere leaving the formal shell of liberal democracy remaining.

If this seems abstract and unrelated to tourism, consider the fact that residents in the Algarve region of southern Portugal have turned to the far right out of a sense of neglect for decades by the established governing parties in favor of the tourism industry (Jack, 2024). The tensions between a capitalist growth impetus and the demand for greater public accountability are vital features of our time. Thus, a detailed examination of the politics of tourism is needed to better understand such dynamics and address issues of social and ecological justice.

This article will provide a focused analysis that draws out key ideas

and points to future pathways for better understanding how politics and tourism are interconnected and impactful. In 1983, Linda Richter (1983, p. 314) famously remarked that the study of tourism and politics had been “almost totally ignored by political science” (notwithstanding early contributions by H. G. Matthews (1978) and distinguished Tanzanian scholar Issa Shivji (1973)). More recently, Butler and Sunkul (2010, p. 2) argued that analyses of the politics of tourism have increased; this is evidenced by the proliferation of academic papers dealing explicitly with questions of politics, ideology, conflict and international relations in tourism (e.g., Crumbaugh, 2000; Endy, 2004; Gorsuch, 2013; Hazbun, 2008; Lisle, 2016).

This article's contribution comes at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic and intensifying climate, energy and geopolitical crises invite new considerations of this topic. Specifically, the pandemic revealed unresolved contradictions within neoliberal capitalism, that were already exposed by the 2008 global financial crisis. The pandemic demonstrated the fragility of globally dispersed ‘just-in-time’ supply chains and the serious vulnerabilities of the global tourism sector (De Bellaigue, 2020). COVID induced the collapse of tourism in 2020, leading to calls from managerial tourism academics for scholars to come to the aid of industry and to help kickstart tourism growth on the one hand (see Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021) and on the other, more reflexive positions urging a radical rethink of the direction and logics of tourism growth (e.g., Lew, Cheer, Haywood, Brouder, & Salazar, 2020). However, despite what appeared to be a moment of reckoning for neoliberal

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capitalism and the seemingly unhindered worldwide growth and expansion of tourism, predictions of neoliberalism's demise and its many variants are proving premature (MacFarlane, 2020).

With these dynamics in mind, this article offers a conceptual analysis (Xin, Tribe, & Chambers, 2013), deduced from empirical research and contemporary events, analysing the interface between tourism and politics, briefly outlining key contemporary issues and introducing some new vistas that offer promising lines for future inquiries. This article serves as an introduction to a curated collection and is intended to help inform future research into the politics of tourism.

2. A context for discussions of the politics of tourism

While awareness of the 'political' nature of tourism appeared in some of the earlier anti-colonial literature (e.g., Fanon, 1963, p. 152) and infused Turner and Ash's (1975) influential polemic against the nascent mass tourism of the 1960s and 1970s, it is widely agreed that Linda Richter's book *The Politics of Tourism in Asia* (1989) marked the opening of considerations of politics in tourism scholarship. Here, she made the case that "tourism is a highly political phenomenon" (p. 2) and it matters in terms of its impacts, the size and competitiveness of the sector, its societal affects and even its shaping of international relations. Originally published in the same year, Cynthia Enloe's (1990) classic text, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* offered a major reassessment of the gendered politics of international relations and travel. Enloe (1990, p. 41) laid bare how tourism, far from being peripheral to world politics, constituted "one of the principal pillars of contemporary world power".

It is no coincidence perhaps that over three decades since the publication of Richter's book, given the sheer global value of tourism and its importance as an avenue of capital accumulation for many powerful corporate interests, attempts to question the growth of tourism along with critical analysis of power and politics in tourism has met with protests from certain quarters such as Trinet. In 2017, at the height of discontent towards tourism in Barcelona, an editorial in the Spanish daily *El País* (2017) sought to discredit protestors by highlighting the association of a small minority with Catalan separatists. Political and business elites, horrified at any attempt to question the dominant logics of the city's tourism business model, accused them of 'tourism-phobia' (Rabassa, 2017).

The attendant institutionalization of hard neoliberal logics within universities (Ayikoru, Tribe, & Airey, 2009) has also meant that critical-political work in tourism studies is sparse due to the increased self-censorship of tourism academics. This derives from their career prospects increasingly depending on aligning research interests with narrow, institutionally defined goals, ultimately determined by research rankings and the entrepreneurial drive to compete with other higher educational institutions for funding, philanthropy and students.

The interrelations between tourism and politics unfold at different geographical scales and are enmeshed within varying political-institutional contexts. We might consider the phenomenon in terms of the policies and actions of diverse actors, including government and the public sector (Elliott, 1997), private sector, community, civil society and non-governmental organizations. Of equal relevance are questions of governance and meta-governance and the ensemble of institutional power arrangements which exert power over and through tourism at international, transnational, regional, national, local and micro societal levels (see Amore & Hall, 2016; Bramwell, 2011; Burns & Novelli, 2007). Complexity and systems approaches have also featured in recent analyses (e.g., Hall, 2010). Additionally, geopolitics has offered new insights through analysing the interplay of geographies (global to local) and politics in tourism (e.g., Hall, 2017; Hazbun, 2008).

Further, the preoccupation with tourism as an instrument of peace has a long pedigree, credited back to Thomas Cook in the 19th century (Brendon, 1991). Debbie Lisle (2016) nevertheless interrogates the assumption that 'tourism = peace' given the multi-scalar entanglements

of tourism, war and conflict that has marked global travel since its very inception (Seaton, 1999). The significance of tourism as a diplomatic tool and its imbrication with different conceptions of citizenship have also been taken up in the literature by tourism scholars (e.g., Bianchi & Stephenson, 2014; Rojek, 1998; Urry, 1995). The notion of tourism as a benign form of mobility with an allegedly unique capacity to engender peace is also part of the established lexicon of UN Tourism, whose promotion to a specialized agency of the United Nations in 2003 was an important indicator of the growing political significance of global tourism (Ferguson, 2007). Nevertheless, tourists and tourism infrastructure are attractive targets for politically motivated violence (Bianchi, 2007).

In this work, we consider the politics of tourism to be importantly shaped by the era of the 'Necroocene'. This term describes how: "Capitalism leaves in its wake the disappearance of species, languages, cultures, and peoples. It seeks the planned obsolescence of all life. Extinction lies at the heart of capitalist accumulation" (McBrien, 2016, p. 116). We have reached a critical stage where overpopulation, overuse of 'resources' and environmental deterioration require "significant societal changes in values and management" (Steffen, Crutzen, & McNeill, 2007, p. 620). In the face of multiple intersecting and compounding crises, described as 'polycrisis' (Tooze, 2022), the political nature, the political context and the limits of politics in tourism matter significantly. Indeed, tourism is implicated in these crises, even contributing to 'ecocide' (Hall, 2022). Such an era suggests new questions and mechanisms of governance which inevitably entail political processes and ideological differences. As Harvey and Perry expressed it, we require open and equitable collaborations and "...collaborative governance in the broadest sense, a blurring between locality and state, between site and ecosystem and between culture and nature" (2015, p. 15).

Given such a context, tourism analyses must be increasingly complex, critical and multi-scalar in order to be able to direct tourism policy and planning mechanisms for interventions that are adequate to address the manifold challenges presented by a world beset by climate breakdown and polycrisis. This necessitates eschewing appeals to pragmatism and techno-fixes, transcending 'planning as usual', rethinking existing frameworks of governance so they advance beyond merely seeking to temper, reform and moderate the balance between capital and nature and most importantly, internalizing externalities. It also requires extending democracy and social justice deep into the sphere of 'economics', as Bianchi has argued: "Democratic forms of public control over tourism capital and investment are needed in order to sever the grip of markets and capital on tourism governance and destination planning" (2022, p. 100).

3. Politics and tourism knowledge as interdisciplinary

Surveying the academic literature on the politics of tourism in October 2024 using the Scopus database identified 2264 documents (using a simple search of 'politics' and 'tourism' in article titles, abstracts and key words) in the years between 1975 and 2023. Contributions have been rising since 1975, with contributions from the social sciences (1587), business and management (688), arts and humanities (569), environmental sciences (294), economics and finance (211) and other disciplines. Threads of politics of tourism analyses are clearly evident, including politics, political economy, political ecology, international relations, development studies and geopolitics (see Fig. 1). One of the significant features of analyses that address the intersections of politics and tourism is their interdisciplinary nature. This section will briefly review key literature advancing the conceptualization of the politics of tourism and outline some of the predominant threads.

From a philosophical perspective, politics can be viewed as the discussion of the good life and the good society. This is the reason that Beiner characterizes politics as a 'moral science' (1984, p. 472). In terms of tourism, such a political analysis would encourage both thought and action that shapes tourism for serving the 'public good', promoting

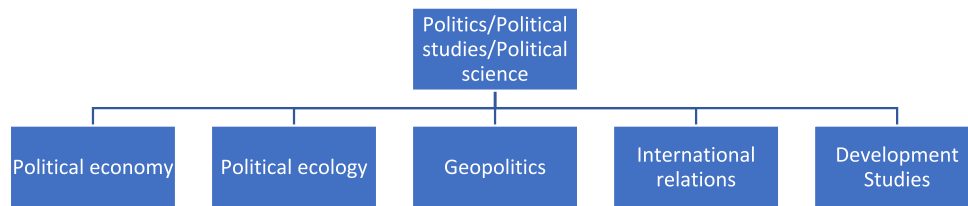


Fig. 1. Current theoretical approaches to the politics of tourism.

democratic participation and fostering thriving in and through tourism. Such a philosophically normative approach is relatively rare but represented in historic articles including Macbeth's 'ethics platform for tourism' (2005) and Hultsman's 'just tourism' (1995). More recent work has explored tourism and community well-being (Chassagne & Everingham, 2019) and tourism for the public good (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020).

Hall's *Tourism and Politics: Policy, Power and Place* (1994) was the first book to comprehensively bring political theory into tourism analysis. Drawing on politics and political economy analyses, notably the ideas of Marxist scholars Stephen Lukes and David Harvey, Hall (1994) foregrounded the notion that the tourism economy is political. Hall was one of the first to explicitly draw attention to the shortcomings of orthodox 'quasi-positivistic' research in tourism, which tended to ignore the role of power and that tourism development processes are themselves the product of ideology and conflicts over the organization of production, space and resource allocation.

Clearly, politics is about power and privilege as it concerns "who gets what, when and how" (Hall, 2010, p. 9). The edited volume by Church and Coles (2006) *Tourism, Power and Space* addressed issues of power and (dis)empowerment both theoretically and in particular geographic contexts. It underscored the concern with struggles over place and the dialectical dynamics of appropriation, commodification, privatization, dispossession and concomitant resistance to these attempts. Additionally, power pervades tourism academia; for instance, Hall (2011) has written about the politics and power dynamics in tourism studies' fieldwork and Chok (2011) conducting 'politically-sensitive' fieldwork. The latter is of particular concern where tourism scholars negotiate the boundaries between scholarship and activism as they face tourism induced injustices and inequities (see Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018).

There is the question of at which particular scale – micro, local, state, regional, international or transnational levels – the analysis of tourism and politics should take place. Lin argued, due to 'Anglo-Western' dominance of tourism studies, "discussion of politics in tourism development is normally limited to the level of local authorities, without considering much about state power, let alone state propaganda" (2023, p. 78). At a more macro level, considerations of tourism's contributions to a developing cosmopolitanism suggests the intercultural interactions through tourism may contribute to fostering a cosmopolitan consciousness among international tourists and local hosts (Salazar, 2010; Swain, 2009). That said, one must distinguish between the elite forms of cosmopolitanism enjoyed by privileged travellers purchasing types of luxury, 'sustainable tourism', for whom 'environmentally friendly' travel is effortlessly incorporated into their experience while avoiding questions of unequal power relations and injustices (Publicis Sapient & Skift, 2021), and grassroots cosmopolitanism derived from solidaristic forms of travel and transnational advocacy (see Kassis, 2013).

Mostafanezhad et al. (2021) have taken an interdisciplinary approach to analyze the geopolitics of tourism using a concept of 'geopolitical tourism assemblages'. This approach combines the framings of infrastructures, imaginaries and affects as a way to understand how tourism exerts power materially, discursively and in touristic relations and is illustrated through case studies in their edited volume In their work on tourism and securitization, for example, Becklake & Wynne-Hughes (2023, p. 2) demonstrated that tourism is not simply

subject to forms of governance, rather, "it has emerged into a global mobilities system with immense power", transforming states and reshaping governance systems from within.

Political economy approaches offer insights into economic and political relations of power in tourism. For Bianchi, a political economy lens can highlight "the forces of accumulation and configurations of class and institutional power that shape the structures and distributional outcomes of tourism development" (2018, p. 89). Employing a political economy lens, Britton explained how international institutions (e.g., UN Tourism, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, UNESCO, etc.) "... set the parameters of tourism planning, promotion, identification of tourism products, investment and infrastructure construction policies often in conjunction with metropolitan tourism companies" (Britton, 1982, p. 339). These organizations were crucial in helping to establish the material, institutional and ideational scaffolding for the international tourism system still operational today. That said, constant mutations in processes of tourism capital accumulation together with the growing complexity of corporate ownership and patterns of investment demand continual critical theorization of the structures of power, modes of governance, forms of politics and geopolitical relations and how these intertwine with tourism practices.

Mostafanezhad et al. explained "Political ecology is an interdisciplinary framework with which to examine ecological matters from a broadly defined political economy perspective" (2016, p. 3). In terms of tourism studies, political ecology analyses focus on the intersections between tourism and social-ecological relations, often through transdisciplinary perspectives. Stonich offered a framework for tourism political ecology analyses, which included: *ideologies* that determine who benefits and who is disadvantaged; *international interests* that dictate particular patterns of natural resource use; *the way the global economy promotes specific patterns of resource use*; *the role of the state in setting policies that favor certain interests over others*; *conflicts that emerge from class and ethnic structures*; *the interrelations among local resource users and others who impact resource use*; and *the diversity in the decisions of local resource managers* (1998, p. 29).

Development studies has been important in addressing the ways in which countries might modernize and achieve a desired level of wealth and well-being through tourism. The field has evolved since its early days when developing countries were expected to follow a set development trajectory supposedly emulating the Global North in forgoing subsistence economies for finding a niche in the globalized trade regime. Tourism development has often been pressed on countries of the Global South as a pathway to desired development (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008, p. 2). More recent thinking proposes "development must also be seen as embracing values of social justice, self-determination and empowerment, as well as enhancing the wellbeing of peoples and environments in tourism locales" (Scheyvens, 2024, p. 2).

This section has outlined the current academic domain of the politics of tourism, identifying key theoretical frameworks and their theoretical contributions to understanding the politics of tourism. In the next section, we delve further to identify issues that have emerged as key focal points of concern.

4. Issues for analysis

4.1. *Tourism as politics*

Mowforth and Munt argued for understanding 'tourism as politics' (2003), examining the ways in which tourism becomes a vehicle for implementing political agendas and political interventions. They offered the example of the efforts of Cuba, Jamaica and Grenada in the early 1980s to overturn the imperialistic and even racist nature of conventional tourism in the Caribbean and inaugurate a 'new tourism' that would be inclusive and result in equitable development (Mowforth & Munt, 2003, pp. 258–260). This intervention broadened understanding of tourism possibilities beyond the technocratic and atheoretical focus which characterizes the majority of tourism business research.

The clearest example of 'tourism as politics' is the niche of political tourism, which describes tourism undertaken for a political purpose, tours arranged by political agencies or advocates and trips to destinations designated as 'political'. Historical forms have included trips to the Soviet Union by admirers of communism (see Fitzpatrick & Rasmussen, 2008) and Cuban internationalism. In some analyses it has been called solidarity tourism (Mahrouse, 2015), development tourism (Spencer, 2018) or justice tourism (Kassis, 2013).

We can also understand tourism as a means to communicate political messages and agendas. Richter (1989) provided a case study of President Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines using tourism and events to whitewash his regime's poor human rights record. Lin has proposed tourism as a propaganda system in his analysis of 'red tourism' in China (2023). Lin offered a tourism-propaganda framework which demonstrates mass tourism can be used for mass communications for state propaganda purposes. Less overtly coercive but no less significant was the mobilization of a powerful semiotic politics by Spain's military dictatorship in the 1960s, not simply to pave the way for tourism development but to build a new form of Spanish modernity (Crumbaugh, 2000).

Burtner and Castañeda (2010) wrote about the use of tourism boycotts as 'tourism governmentality' in the case of Guatemala in 1979. Recently, work is exploring the complex intersections between tourism, sanctions, boycotts and buycotts (e.g., Seyfi & Hall, 2019; Shaheer, Insch, & Carr, 2017), suggesting that tourism is perceived as vulnerable to political actions and endeavours. Additionally, Yang (2023, p. 303) described a "politicization of tourism consumption", which she defines as "...the process by which various institutional forces interact to mobilize tourists who subsequently engage in political behavior to promote national interests". It is evident that the power of tourism (non) consumption is ripe for further analysis.

In this curated collection, the complex ethics of tourists' decisions to boycott is addressed in Siamak Seyfi et al.'s "Whose justice? Social (in) justice in tourism boycotts" (2023). They examine political consumerism through an analysis of the calls to boycott travel to Myanmar as action for social justice following the most recent 2021 military junta takeover and human rights violations. The discourses of tourists were analyzed and findings indicated diverse justice narratives among tourists, including some concerned with human rights and political notions of justice and others the community and economic impacts of boycotts. The authors advocate for a "moral turn" in tourism studies addressing the moral decision-making of tourists.

In "Building consent for counterterrorism: Lonely Planet and Rough Guide tips for women tourists to revolutionary Egypt", Elisa Wynne-Hughes (2023) explains how the discourses in some tourist guidebooks advising western women travellers how to stay safe in their travels to Egypt normalize the counter terrorism discourses of West states and the Egyptian government focused on "bad Muslim men". Wynne-Hughes contribution demonstrates how tourism plays a role in normalizing dominant political narratives, in this case associating conservative Egyptian culture with violence and threat, thus supporting racialized, classed and gendered hierarchies in the global order.

Finally, 'tourism as politics' analyses should consider the deliberately silenced and marginalized. For example, Isaac, Hall, and Higgins-Desbiolles (2016) addressed the politics of tourism in Palestine, a people and place subjected to attempted political erasure (see Tibi, n.d.). Additionally, work on children and youth in tourism is another promising vein of research addressing silenced voices and presenting novel methodologies such as 'voice generative' methods (Canosa, Moyle, & Wray, 2016). Such works point to the potential for political analyses in tourism to unmask power and domination and empower the disempowered.

4.2. *From public good to private profit*

Our world has been shaped by neoliberal marketization dynamics that have worked to privatize public goods, dismantle social supports and commodify social and ecological spaces. This has had significant ramifications in terms of human freedom and social and ecological justice. These dynamics feature in tourism, as prior understandings of tourism as a social force equitably available through supports such as social tourism have given away almost totally to industrialized and commercialized tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). Important analysis on transitions in socialist countries have spotlighted issues of equity in access to tourism and a shift from solidarity through domestic tourism to internationalized holiday circuits in the globalized economy (see, for example, Williams & Baláz, 2001).

A significant body of work has analyzed the transformations of tourism under neoliberal capitalism from politics, political economy, political ecology and development studies' lenses (e.g., Duffy, 2008; Fletcher, 2023; Wearing, McDonald, Taylor, & Ronen, 2019). Neoliberal tourism policies feature requirements for continuous growth that spark crises, including significant social tensions (seen recently in over-tourism) and ecological damages and threats (including those emanating from climate change). This has resulted in the paradox that tourism's success undermines the very foundations of its future. As a result, many analysts have considered alternative futures and possibilities for tourism, including 'post-capitalist tourism' (Fletcher et al., 2023), 'socializing tourism' (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020) and 'decommodified' forms of tourism (Wearing et al., 2019). These three depictions hold a good deal in common as they seek to privilege public resources supporting forms of tourism that are geared to the public good and protect the public commons for public enjoyment rather than private profit extraction. Examples illustrate the possibilities of such alternatives, including: the social tourism work of SESC São Paulo, Brazil; the workers' takeover of the Hotel Bauen that resulted in a workers' owned hotel in Buenos Aires, Argentina; and the nature and heritage conservation project of La Trapa, Majorca, Spain which is established as a shared commons for both locals and tourists to enjoy (see Fletcher et al., 2023).

In this curated collection, Patricia Johnson, Everingham, and Everingham (2023) utilize a political economy lens to uncover the policy decisions and actions that supported the hosting of a major supercars event in Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia. Theorizing the dynamics behind the event as "neoliberalizing public-private partnerships", led in this case by destination marketing organization Destination NSW, this article documents how public space was privatized, public monies opaquely spent and citizen protests made impotent through a series of acts that undermined norms of good governance. In response, the local residents group acted collectively to gather information and resist the event's imposition on their heritage neighborhood. This work illuminates political actions that might be able to disrupt the dominations that neoliberalizing public-private partnerships currently are able to exert to usurp events for fostering tourism growth.

Michelle McLeod's "Tourism policy networks in four Caribbean countries" (2023) addresses power dynamics in tourism policy networks in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. This is accomplished through a social network analysis based on

analysing tourism plans and reports to better understand the policy actors contributing to tourism governance in these states, including public and private sector actors. Findings show that the tourism policy network relationships influence the type of tourism development and a balanced composition of policy actors is needed to ensure that tourism development occurs for wider benefit, including community actors.

4.3. Tourism and social movements

While protests against 'overtourism' in many European cities have been brought to public attention by the media, grass-roots resistance to the deleterious effects of tourism has in fact been long-existing, often spearheaded by civil society organizations in the Global South (Stancliffe, 2013). Social movements gained greater prominence with neoliberal globalization, particularly those associated with the emergence of the anti-corporate global justice movement of the 1990s (Mayo, 2006). Although heterogeneous in composition and interest, transnational and localized citizens' activism has gained momentum worldwide as the democratic state itself has lurched from crisis to crisis and people have become increasingly disenchanted with mainstream political processes.

While the precise nature of 'social movements' is debated (see Eschle & Maiguaschca, 2005), for our purposes social movements can be defined as "an organized effort by a significant number of people to change (or resist change in) some major aspects of society" (McGehee, 2002, p. 125). Social movements are a means through which citizens seek to influence political processes outside of the election cycle or when political leadership fails to engage with public concerns. Furthermore, social movements may be as focused on the politics of cultural recognition as they are with the material distribution of resources, axes of struggle which are of course deeply intertwined (see Fraser, 1995). However, popular discontent with mainstream politics may take reactionary as well as progressive forms.

Tourism non-governmental organizations have been especially important in building social movements for responsible tourism. For example, Tourism Concern, founded in 1988 in the United Kingdom, focused on human rights and attention to tourism impacts (see Botterill, 1991). Tourism Concern was part of wider network of church groups and European organizations that came together under the aegis of the Third World Tourism Ecumenical Network to raise awareness of tourism's adverse impacts on communities of the Global South. It is evident in the recent activism of social movements and public protests that they are legitimate parts of democratic political processes seeking to counter corporate power interests in the tourism political arena.

While it is important to stress that tourism-related protest movements are neither universal nor are their concerns necessarily aligned, current levels of discontent towards tourism certainly appear unprecedented in scope. Most notably, there has been an upsurge of contestation in many European mass tourism destinations. For example, in Barcelona, a variety of urban social movements and neighborhood associations have come together to campaign on a range of intersecting concerns, including real estate speculation, spiralling housing costs, residential displacement and precarious working conditions, all of which are closely linked to accelerated tourism growth and proliferation of online holiday rental platforms (Milano, Novelli, & Cheer, 2019). Understandably, the climate crisis has also attracted the attention of social activists regarding the continual growth of aviation. For example, the Stay Grounded network advocates for a just, environmentally sound transport system and for a rapid reduction in air travel as a response to the threat of global climate change (Stay Grounded, n.d.).

In a context of growing public concern with neoliberalism's undermining of democratic participation and a growing frequency of myriad crises, we anticipate increasing activation of social movements concerned with tourism.

4.4. The local turn in tourism

Following the disruption of the COVID pandemic, which resulted in greater focus on domestic tourism, proximity tourism and more regionalized tourism circuits, Higgins-Desbiolles and Bigby identified a 'local turn' in tourism (2022). Similarly, mindful of the fact that nearly a third of Europe's population are unable to participate in a week-long holiday away from home (a figure rising considerably at a global scale), Cañada and Izcarra (2021) explored different strands of debate around proximity tourism. Rather than only a question of reorientating tourist flows towards local areas, this work explored the connection between localizing tourism and the prospects for an 'eco-social' transition which foregrounds the rights of tourism workers and local residents to enjoy leisure and travel opportunities.

The agenda to 'localize tourism' has a clear political foundation as it seeks to "...address contemporary power imbalances and injustices in tourism by focusing on and empowering local communities" (Higgins-Desbiolles & Bigby, 2022, p. 1). Building on the argument that tourism should be defined by putting the local community at the centre of tourism, rather than the tourists or the tourism industry, Higgins-Desbiolles and Bigby (2022, p. 3) argued that we should understand the 'local' more broadly; as the local people, the local ecology inclusive of all beings and also future generations. The political imperative to involve the local community in tourism decision-making and management can be seen as a response to the growing problems such as overtourism and public protests (Higgins-Desbiolles & Bigby, 2022).

These analyses open up avenues ripe for exploration include the rights of citizens in local communities where tourism occurs, the use of citizen budgeting to prioritize public funds and citizen assemblies as a means to make tourism decision-making democratic, transparent and accountable. However, such an approach must address weaknesses in visitor economy governance and guard against the capture of local governments by corporate interests and clientelist political classes, a factor that has been instrumental in decades of illegal hotel construction and expansion of tourism infrastructures in Spain (Murray, 2015).

A focus on localizing tourism through proximity tourism has profound possibilities for tourism dependent countries of the Global South. It could allow a shift from a vulnerable dependency on international tourism that results from the dictates and machinations of multinational corporations, international financial institutions and international non-governmental organizations to domestic and regional tourism that could be more compatible with local thriving, local cultures and sustainable local economies (see Higgins-Desbiolles, 2022). For example, Melubo and Doering (2022) explained how the COVID pandemic temporarily curtailed international tourists' visitation to Tanzania, which encouraged greater local participation in tourism, revealing a Tanzanian conviviality through tourism that contrasted to the wildlife safaris that international markets seek. Studies in localizing tourism are likely to increase in number and importance as the impacts of climate change and other crises continue to impact tourism operations.

4.5. Politics of attention

There are competing priorities for the governance of tourism. Key questions concern how information is gathered from which sources (with issues of quality and bias) and how is this information then prioritized for action. "There are powerful psychological, political, and institutional forces that support the prevailing arrangements and are resistant to new information. The policymaking system ignores some bits of information, while giving others disproportionate attention and credence" (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005, p. ix). The concept of the 'issue attention lifecycle' describes the cycle of how an issue might rise to prominence and then gradually fade from view while remaining largely unresolved (Downs cited in Hall, 2008, p. 46).

In tourism, there are clearly visible zones of attention and inattention. This establishes which issues will be prioritized for policy (in

action. As Jones and Baumgartner (2005) suggested, there is a tendency to support the status quo and business as usual. Even when new approaches are demanded, such as the imperative for sustainable development, they will be shaped by prevailing forces to reduce the more radical, transformative potential. This is arguably the trajectory of sustainable tourism policy to date (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021; Jamal, Camargo, & Wilson, 2013).

Current tourism concerns in the zone of attention include over-tourism, regenerative tourism and the climate change crisis; we might be attentive to how these topics are addressed in terms of action and resourcing. The important topic of climate justice is currently situated in the zone of inattention (see *Tourism Panel on Climate Change*, 2023, p. 18), but may be on the cusp of transitioning to the zone of attention. The media plays a very important role in bringing issues, such as over-tourism, to attention and framing issues in certain ways (see Clarke & Nyaupane, 2020), which may serve media interest and/or the interests of their corporate owners.

As noted earlier, efforts to engage with tourism's 'political' essence and identify new, more politicized lines of enquiry, have often been resisted. Yet, as the effects of chronic economic, financial, environmental, health, social and political crises increasingly come into focus and "metastasize everywhere" (Fraser, 2021, p. 95), the sharpening contradictions of accelerating tourism growth and predatory resort development are increasingly difficult to ignore. Moreover, the recent protests in the Canary Islands (Canarias *Ahora Canarias*, 2024), which brought tens of thousands of residents on the streets to protest against excessive hotel construction and spiralling housing costs associated with growth in online holiday rental platforms, represent more than an expression of discontent with years of unrestrained tourism development and its damaging effects on regional ecologies. They signal a deep-rooted political crisis connected to the insulation of tourism development from democratic citizen oversight.

The technocratic model of neoliberal governance, which, in seeking to expel politics from economic decision-making, has thus paradoxically laid bare the deeply ideological nature of tourism itself. Indeed, the sheer depth and breadth of collapse of destinations across the planet following the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic served to demonstrate just how far tourism has penetrated deep into the capillaries of global society and the degree to which it underpins the economic survival of many states. While it became possible, for a moment, to imagine a world without tourism, at the same time this unprecedented hiatus served only to reinforce tourism's omnipresence, a paradox which can only be unlocked through democratic political endeavour.

Such insights invite us to explore new vistas in tourism. Here we offer decolonization, diverse epistemologies and 'alter politics' as possibilities that may offer opportunities to better empower the *demos* of tourism and build frameworks that support greater equity and justice in tourism futures.

5. New vistas for analysis

5.1. Decolonization

A critical context of ongoing power and political discrepancies in global order is the continual failure to dismantle the unequal and unfair global infrastructure that has resulted from the failure to complete decolonization. As Grosfoguel noted:

The heterogeneous and multiple global structures put in place over a period of 450 years did not evaporate with the juridical-political decolonization of the periphery over the past 50 years. We continue to live under the same 'colonial power matrix' (2011, p. 14).

Rastegar et al. have written about decolonization in tourism as one part of an essential transformation towards justice in tourism as it addresses ongoing "power asymmetries" (2023, pp. 2621–2).

With a decolonial lens, we can better understand issues of tourism dependency, the failure of trickle-down tourism economics and a lack of any exemplary cases of a developing nation advancing in development status through a tourism dependent economy (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2022). Decolonial thinking offers profound opportunities to think through issues of power, inequity and injustice in tourism. This work is currently in its infancy and is deserving of greater attention. Chambers and Buzinde (2015, p. 3) argued that scholars committed to decolonizing tourism must embark on a "radical project of epistemic de-linking from colonial ways of thinking". Ayikoru (2024) provided an approach to decolonizing tourism in her conceptual analysis of the possibilities of shifting tourism throughout Africa away from dependency on international tourism to domestic and regional tourism, thus supporting greater African sovereignty and undermining the ongoing legacies of colonialism.

The threat of climate change contributes to a revival of decolonial agendas through calls for climate justice. Climate justice emphasizes that those least responsible for causing climate change are those most likely to be first and most greatly impacted by its effects, particularly communities of the Global South and Indigenous communities. This injustice has been described as 'carbon inequality' and draws attention to the 'carbon privilege' of the wealthy minority and their over-consumption that fuels the crisis, including tourism. As a result, NGOs have called for a "Loss and Damage Fund" to support the nations of the Global South and address these injustices (Oxfam Australia, 2023). Specifically in terms of tourism, a report focused on climate justice in tourism proposed a "climate solidarity fund" as one mechanism to address the inequities in global tourism mobilities (Bigby, Smith, & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2024, p. 40).

5.2. Feminist, indigenist, queer and non-western epistemologies and methodologies

Feminist, Indigenist, Queer and non-Western epistemologies and methodologies are transforming tourism knowledges in profound ways. They are vital to the advancement of the politics of tourism analysis as they address power and oppression, privilege marginalized forms of knowing and in diverse ways promote emancipation and thriving. Here we attend to feminist and Indigenist approaches specifically. We also briefly address a growing backlash against these empowering and emancipatory forces seen in a campaign against 'wokeness' advocating banning critical race theory and diversity, equity and inclusion measures.

Feminist methodologies are vital to the study of the politics of tourism as they provide valuable tools to analyze the claims of tourism advocates, including from critical, responsible and sustainable positionings. Enloe's (1990) classic text offers an original and inspiring example. Enloe's work shows how feminist methodologies link the personal and the political and are attuned to the voices of the grassroots and impacted. As Enloe et al. described it, "[a] feminist curiosity asks us to unearth those voices that have been silenced, those experiences that have been rendered invisible and those lives that have been marginalized" (2016, p. 541). Gada Mahrouse demonstrates how feminist analysis can unmask power and privilege in forms of 'responsible tourism' that are argued to foster solidarity by "... interrogat[ing] the production of intersecting racialized and gendered identities and on the challenges of transnational alliances within contemporary global economic conditions" (2015, p. 375).

We must also address the politics of knowledge in tourism. Pioneering work has unpacked colonizing forms of knowledge (Smith, 1999) which underpin many disciplines and explained how these have been used as active forces of subjugation and exploitation. Important work by Chambers and Buzinde (2015), Tebrakunna Country and Lee (2017) and Wijesinghe (2020) have challenged Western/Eurocentric dominance and suggested the possibilities for Indigenous and non-Western epistemologies to reconfigure the power dynamics in tourism

and tourism studies. For instance, Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies emphasize relationality, bonds of care and responsibilities (see Mika & Scheyvens, 2022); they also reject militant nationalism, racism and supremacy, land theft and exploitative capitalism. Such approaches help illuminate how the waged economy promoted by tourism-led development is often used to break the autonomy and self-determination that accompanies more localized subsistence and diversified economies.

While we value these diverse knowledges in this analysis of the politics of tourism, we must also recognise the growing backlash to such epistemologies in certain locations. This has been packaged as an ‘anti-woke’ agenda in some Western nations (woke refers to awareness and concern with (racial) justice issues). It is well advanced in certain states of the USA such as Florida, that has passed legislation banning certain books and teaching of curricula pertaining to critical race theory in public universities and colleges (see Davis & Kane, 2023). It is deserving of more critical attention in tourism studies as it has apparently impacted tourism and travel (see Jackman, 2023) and tertiary education.

In this curated collection, the impacts of political ideologies on travel are addressed by Jelena Vukomanovic, Barbieri, Knollenberg, Yoshizumi, and Arroyo (2022) in “To travel or not to travel during COVID-19”. They undertook a quantitative study in the politically divided context of the USA during the first wave of Covid-19, surveying the level of concern about travel and likelihood to travel. Responses were mapped against identified political leanings to determine if political ideology affected willingness to travel during the pandemic. The findings indicated ideologically right leaning individuals expressed that they were more likely to travel in this context. The work underscores that destination managers need to consider the influence of political ideologies in shaping tourism flows and discontinuities. As we think about tourism futures in the face of polycrisis, these insights into societal polarization, the significance of political ideological affiliations and willingness to travel will gain salience.

5.3. Anti-politics versus alter-politics

Ghassan Hage’s analysis of *Alter-politics* (2015) is useful in thinking through recent political discussions in the tourism academy concerning the value of critical discourse. Hage explained that anti-politics emphasizes opposition to enemies, while alter-politics engages in radical imaginings of alternatives ways and possible futures. Hage analyzed alter-politics particularly because historically radical movements found themselves repeating the same mistakes when taking power as those they opposed. Some tourism analysts indeed employ a view of tourism commensurate with Hage’s ‘alter-politics’ conceptualisation. That is, they criticise current exploitative tourism models while simultaneously envisioning more just forms (e.g., Everingham & Chassagne, 2020; Fletcher et al., 2023; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). An attention to alter-politics as we discuss issues of power and disempowerment in tourism offers promising ways to avoid sterile, anti-tourism critiques as well as the window-dressing of reformist approaches. This would also imply rejecting dichotomous – ‘pro/anti-tourism’ – framings which serve to occlude rather than reveal the deeper *subterranean* dynamics of tourism capitalism (paraphrasing Sassen, 2014. p. 5) and its intertwined relations of domination and exploitation.

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a milestone as numerous calls emerged to reform and reimagine tourism in light of the pandemic’s lessons on the costs of tourism dependency, including Lew et al. (2020), Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) and Everingham and Chassagne (2020). Opponents argued the only sensible response to the pandemic crisis was resurgence in tourism growth once the crisis passed, to alleviate the suffering of the tourism industry, tourism workers and tourism-dependent regions; this was labelled a ‘war over tourism’ (see Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021).

No doubt, the political debates on tourism futures will continue. The

ultimate question to ask is: who benefits from tourism? Also a corollary, what are the assumptions and mechanisms shaping its underlying ‘value’? Thus, critical, political scholarship is vital in its commitment “to uncover the winners and losers in particular social arrangements and the processes by which such power plays operate” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 437). In this regard, any shift towards localized tourism practices and models of tourism commensurate with a notion of the ‘public good’ must have a just transition strategy. This would entail planning for and with tourism workers, marginalized groups dependent on tourism income and destination communities whose livelihoods would be impacted by such transitions.

Practice of alter-politics is evident in contemporary tourism practice, as certain leaders such as Destination Think and Group Nao have undertaken innovative initiatives. Destination Think supported Tourism Bay of Plenty, Aotearoa/New Zealand in transitioning to a holistic regenerative tourism strategic tourism plan in 2019 (Destination Think, n.d.). In 2021, Group Nao managed the DMOcracy campaign which worked with 42 destination partners in Europe and North America exploring how to activate citizen participation in destination management (Group Nao, n.d.). Expectations of tourism are changing as a result of crises such as the COVID pandemic and climate change; alter-politics offers an opportunity to guide this change for wider benefit and thriving. As we argued above, these concerns are the very essence of the politics of tourism.

6. Conclusion

The politics of tourism is complex, with multiple dimensions to explore through multidisciplinary approaches that offer valuable insights into how tourism processes intersect with power, place, privilege, ecology, change and more. But the foundational question of politics as philosophy is how we might shape tourism to serve our efforts in supporting ‘good’ lives, ‘good’ societies and promoting human thriving. The politics of tourism represents a contestation over the future of tourism, bringing to the fore questions of power, privilege and resistance.

In this introduction to the curated collection, we have highlighted issues including the ways in which tourism embodies politics, the effects of neoliberalizing processes on tourism, the rise of social movements in response to governmental failures and complicities with neoliberalizing forces, the emergence of a local turn in tourism and the politics of (in)attention to vital issues arising, especially climate change, polycrisis and climate justice. Additionally, we briefly explored promising new vistas that are emerging through which politics, power and profit in tourism might be challenged, including decolonizing studies and practice, diverse methodologies and epistemologies and the promise of alter-politics.

This analysis has underscored the requirement for nuanced analyses as tourism operates at multiple scales and entails diverse political-institutional processes in the many places it impacts. While opposition to poor tourism management and development is increasingly evident, simplistic notions of anti- or pro-tourism are not helpful in ensuring we understand tourism dynamics and can effectively manage it for just and sustainable futures. This is where alter-politics requires further exploration for its utility in tourism analysis. These new vistas explored here offer a normative exposition of critical questions of how might tourism be democratized, inclusively expanded and transformed to support the good lives of all engaged and impacted by tourism.

Political analyses are vital to progression in tourism research, teaching and practice. This curated collection is intended to support such efforts and to enhance the capacities of tourism scholars to better engage with the political dynamics that shape contemporary tourism. There is much more work to be done to advance tourism’s capacities to support widespread good living and so it is anticipated this curated collection will grow. It offers an invitation to explore new vistas in tourism that expand the emancipatory, empowering, just and equitable potentialities in tourism so that the many can thrive, rather than merely

the privileged few.

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Freya Higgins-Desbiolles: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Raoul Bianchi:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare there is no conflict of interest in this work.

In our bios we have stated our affiliations (past and ongoing) with two tourism NGOs that we mention in this work. We declare no bias, prejudice or benefit resulting from such association.

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