

Migration, tourism and social sustainability

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Abstract

In practice, the distinctions between tourism and migration are blurred. Tourism often drives various forms of mobility, and an international workforce is central to maintaining functioning tourism economies. This piece sketches out some critical themes and issues concerning intersections of tourism and migration, considering their relationships with and impacts on social sustainability. It highlights the contradictory ways in which tourism and migration are approached as political, social and economic phenomena. Whereas tourism is often viewed more positively, migration is recurrently politicised, and seen to challenge social systems and cultural values, despite the reliance of tourism on migrant labour. The discussion outlines the relevance of social sustainability to studies of migration and tourism. These include the need to assess how tourism planning, development and governance of tourism impacts on the sustainability of communities, which consequently influences attitudes towards migrants and tourists. It also reflects on how migrant-local connections may evolve, creating opportunities for positive, symbiotic co-existence, alongside exploitative relationships. It concludes by inviting further studies examining new forms and interactions between migration and tourism, which considers how research can contribute to greater social sustainability.

Keywords: Community, Host-guest, Impact, Lifestyles, Migrant labour, Mobilities, Sustainability, Social sustainability

Migration and tourism have complex interactions, in some cases one driving the other, while in others, becoming competing practices and phenomena (Dwyer et al., 2014; Hall & Williams, 2002; Pappas & Papatheodorou, 2017; Williams & Hall, 2000). As global mobility intensifies, and tourism and migration become more deeply entangled, further research on their connections, complexities, critical issues and future directions is required. Arguably, our understanding of the intersections of migration and tourism is often obscured by western tourism concepts (Adams, 2020), with scholars and tourism authorities creating binary divisions between them. However, both arise out of a combination of social, economic and/or political factors, and mobilities are nurtured by tropes of imagination, with movement full of hopes, dreams, fears and uncertainties (Carling & Collins, 2018; Zhang & Su, 2020).

Migration and tourism do not emerge as consistent or predictable types of mobility, for example, with long-term migration from poor-to-rich countries and short-term tourism by the privileged elites. Scholars have increasingly recognised the disparate forms that international migratory processes can take, with transitory, incomplete, liquid, circular, seasonal and temporary manifestations (Collins, 2012; Hall & Williams, 2002; Hugo, 1982; Vosko et al., 2014). Long-term migrants, for instance, can become tourists as they travel back to their home countries for short trips, visiting friends and relatives, but also contemplate 'return' migration (Huang & Chen, 2020). There are also dual nationals, second-home owners, retirement migrants, lifestyle migrants, exchange students, contract workers, digital nomads, and working holiday makers who move between categories. 'Short term' is also a relative phrase in tourism, with some tourists becoming temporary or permanent lifestyle migrants (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Huete et al., 2013; Zaban, 2015). Therefore, migration or tourism both involves large-scale movement of people who engage with destinations in various ways and move between distinct categories.

As migration or tourism can be production or consumption oriented, mobility regimes are entangled with each other and other markets, such as retail, education, real estate, entrepreneurship, finance and healthcare. Tourism, like migration, is complex, with each destination having different spatialities, histories, actors, mechanisms, sites and spaces through which mobility is enacted, and where the possibilities for movement are linked to ethnicity, class, wealth and profession (Eisenschitz, 2016). While tourists and migrants intertwine, the global inequalities of bordering regimes and visa systems ensure that their mobilities and experiences also diverge. Most destinations, at least until recently, have risen to meet and support tourists from particular countries by providing them with visa free or low cost entry and broad protections. In contrast, migration has been problematised by divisive policy debates and emotive socio-political rhetoric. Consequently, migrants often have fewer rights than tourists in many destinations because of deep-seated inequalities (Abram et al., 2017; O'Regan, 2019).

There have been growing numbers of studies that link migration and tourism in contemporary societies (e.g., Baum, 2012; Bianchi, 2000; Janta et al., 2012; Lugosi & Allis, 2019; Ndiuni & Baum, 2021). These have examined topics such as the role of globalised capitalism and border management, migrant workers' well-being, social discrimination, inclusion, and settlement in host countries (Bianchi et al., 2020; Choe et al., 2020; Ladkin, 2011; Salazar, 2006). However, despite previous critiques (e.g. Williams & Hall, 2000), conceptualisations of the intersections between migration and tourism remain underdeveloped, with substantial gaps in exiting knowledge. Adams (2020), for example, argued that widely used terms and definitions of 'migration' and 'tourism' are primarily Western-centred, and more complex forms, practices and concepts should be explored within varying cultural and societal contexts. More work on long-term migration, temporary/seasonal migrant workers, lifestyle migrants, migrant workers in the gig economy, return migration and digital nomads is required.

A critical issue to explore within the migration and tourism nexus is how migrants, especially unskilled workers from developing countries, travel, work and live in destinations with limited legal protection, and worker rights. They often experience social discrimination, a lack of social support, inequalities and injustices (Bauder, 2012–13). Whilst many migrants relocate for work, family and/or lifestyle, many others have very little choice as to their spatial movements (Salazar, 2020). Bianchi et al. (2020) recommends adopting critical perspectives in exploring connections between migration and tourism to begin to tackle embedded

structural inequalities and exploitation. Schiller and Salazar (2013, p. 189) point out that the current global order is beset by “different intersecting regimes of mobility” in which the movements of certain categories of people are “normalised” while others’ movements are “criminalised”. Events such as Brexit and terrorist attacks (such as in Paris in 2015), the emergence of wider populist political movements, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated criminalisation and immobilities (Bianchi et al., 2020; Salazar, 2020). Governments have therefore been required to implement innovative policies and practices to address the challenges of contemporary globalization to prevent fear and conflict (Melotti et al., 2018).

Migrant labour is often seen by governments and commercial operators as temporary and ‘disposable,’ which leads to precarious employment, social cleavages and economic inequalities (Robinson et al., 2019), as well as diminished contacts between migrants and locals. Moreover, media representations frequently perpetuate tensions by projecting negative images of certain minorities. Discriminatory profiling of national and ethnic communities further reinforces difference, resulting in greater social divisions (Bianchi et al., 2020).

However, migrant workers contribute significantly to economic development, cultural diversity, innovation, entrepreneurship, alongside knowledge transfer in tourism destinations (Lugosi & Allis, 2019; Williams & Baláž, 2014). Whilst tourism economies are largely measured through tourist arrivals and tourist receipts, the contribution of migrant workers is largely overlooked. Migration often generates tourist flows, through “the geographical extension of friendship and kinship networks” (Williams & Hall, 2000, p. 7). “Migration is an important determinant of VFR tourism and the relationship has progressively grown” (Dwyer et al., 2014, p. 15). Some destinations such as Dubai and Macao cannot sustain its tourism sector without migrant workers (Choe et al., 2020). As Macao’s local labour is not large enough to fill positions in the tourism sector, they need to attract a high number of foreign migrant workers (Choe et al., 2020). Migrants also drive entrepreneurial activities utilising their cultural capital, for example, in the form of gastronomic knowledge, which often become part of the destination’s culture (Farrer, 2021; Lugosi & Allis, 2019). Their contributions to a destination can sometimes become heritage attractions, and can help destinations display “cosmopolitan cultures, which are then used in place marketing and branding” (Janta & Lugosi, 2022, p. 3). Migration can thus transform a host society and impact on its cultural heritage and lifestyle. Migration flows have also contributed to the continuous reconstruction of national and destination identities and images (Melotti et al., 2018; Williams & Hall, 2000). However, while their contributions and impacts are sometimes valorised, the perceived value of migrants and migration is shaped by the changing character of many societies, which grapple with long-term challenges such as aging populations, restricted labour pools, alongside emotive political debates concerning nationality, identity and citizenship (Janta & Lugosi, 2022).

Research on labour and employment issues in countries undergoing rapid tourism economic development has expanded, but research has not caught up with tourism linked migration and social aspects of sustainability. Large numbers of migrant workers move to destinations such as Singapore, Hong Kong, and Dubai for employment; however, issues pertaining to social sustainability (e.g., well-being, integration, the distribution of power and resources, employment, education, the provision of basic infrastructure and services, freedom, justice, access to influential decision-making) have yet to be fully developed within tourism research.

Social sustainability in tourism research from ‘host’ and ‘guest’ perspectives is critical (Scheyvens, 2011; Zhang et al., 2017), and the nexus of migration and tourism is deeply connected to sustainability of host countries/destinations/communities. This concerns community cohesion, governance, place identity, as well as migrant workers’ job security, legal protection, social welfare, well-being, and human rights. Social sustainability can be defined as “development (and/or growth) that is compatible with harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conducive to the compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration, with improvements in the quality of life for all segments of the population” (Polese & Stren, 2000, p. 15–16). Often only seen primarily in economic terms, introducing the concept of social sustainability into the policy making of tourism destinations can improve locals’ and migrants’ lives and requires more attention in tourism studies.

This issue of *Tourism Geographies* aims to reflect upon, assess and develop our understanding of critical issues linking migration, tourism and social sustainability. Despite examining different socio-cultural contexts, the contributing authors strongly suggest that governments should innovate and implement policy changes to become strong and ethical leaders on migration and tourism, to positively influence social sustainability.

Building bridges between tourism and urban studies, in ‘Who is the city for? Overtourism, lifestyle migration and social sustainability,’ Jover and Díaz-Parra examine the tensions between lifestyle migrants from wealthier countries, tourists and local residents in Seville as they share space and resources in the core historic district and urban centre. The authors argue that the rapid increase of tourism and the settlement of lifestyle migrants have resulted in social injustice and unsustainable practices for local communities as lower-income residents cannot afford to live in the area and locals have been gradually excluded from community spaces. While framing social sustainability as the capacity of indigenous communities to reproduce themselves, and preserving their social habits and customs, including avoiding physical displacement, the authors discuss how tourism potentially reshapes historic urban districts in socially unsustainable ways.

In the similar vein, but in a different part of the world – Vietnam – Jones, Bui, and Ando discuss the transformation, gentrification and social sustainability of Hoi An, a World Heritage Site (WHS), using the core-and-buffer-zone principle. In ‘Zoning for world heritage sites: Dual dilemmas in development and demographics,’ the authors describe how massive international tourism inflows resulted in economic benefits including GDP growth, job creation, poverty alleviation and considerable funds for heritage conservation. However, the transformation has also shown negative socio-economic consequences such as price rises in real estate, rents and services for locals. The authors observe that erosion of local lifestyles is a consequence of a Euro-centric planning norm, and stress the need for a reappraisal of the conventional Eurocentric approach to zoning WHSs. By investigating the bipolarity between museumification of the core and concurrent development of the buffer zones, the study bridges a missing link between social sustainability and spatial planning. In doing so, the study contributes to our understanding of the social sustainability of a living heritage site.

In ‘Perceptions of and interactions between locals, migrants, and tourists in South Tyrol,’ Marcher, Kofler, Innerhofer, and Pechlaner examine the tourism and migration nexus in South Tyrol, Italy, where a long history of tourism and multilingualism has attracted migrants. Their study found that the presence of migrants in a destination is strongly connected to the inflow of tourists while tourism further generates in-migration. Locals perceive tourists and migrants as ‘non-local’ or ‘Others’. However, as migrants and tourists interact in increasingly complex

ways with the local community, thus shaping it during their stay, locals tend to accept the 'new' population groups living, working and visiting the destination, and boundaries between them blur.

Lozanski and Baumgartner, in their piece 'Local gastronomy, transnational labour: Farm-to-table tourism and migrant agricultural workers in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada,' explore the phenomenon of Mexican and Caribbean migrant workers travelling to Canada via a bilateral agreements to provide labour essential to the agricultural sector in Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL). This mobile workforce harvests local crops, which forms the basis of a significant gastrotourism sector. However, despite their key role, the structure of this transnational labour programme and the requisite aesthetics of tourism in NOTL render migrant workers' labour invisibility. This invisibility exacerbates the precarity of transnational workers within global capitalism, perpetuating wider societally unsustainable practices.

Beyond invisibility and precarity, Akhmedov, Hunter and Choi highlight the potential for more overt forms of discrimination and prejudice in their examination of public discourses and residents' attitudes towards migrants in South Korea. In 'Q method finds anti-refugee sentiments on Yemeni migration to Jeju,' the authors suggest that interventions including structural shifts in policy or attitude changes through education are necessary to secure any form of social sustainability for resident-refugee relationships. The authors thus point to paths for finding practical solutions to 'host-guest' tensions.

In "Traditional Mexican Midwifery" tourism excludes indigenous "others" and threatens sustainability,' Vega explores an expanding form of niche tourism to understand and challenge some of the underlying, intersectional issues threatening 'sustainability' in ethnomedical travel and consumption. She argues that neocolonial values and norms embedded in this type of tourism subtly reinforces romanticised stereotypes of the indigenous 'Other'. Ethnographic examples from multi-sited research in Mexico and Brazil demonstrate the usefulness of 'Traditional Mexican Midwifery' for critiquing existing misapplications of responsible tourism and proposing more sustainable futures.

Finally, in his commentary, 'Labour migration and tourism mobilities: Time to bring sustainability into the debate,' Salazar stresses that migration and tourism are interconnected, similar but different forms of human mobility. Whilst tourism and migration often fuel each other, it is impossible to draw clear boundaries between the two because they constantly intersect, sometimes within one and the same individual. He notes that research on mobility often focuses merely on tourist movements in tourism studies while sustainability is directly related to the 'mobility' aspects of tourism-related labour. He adds that there has also been little detailed examination of the mechanisms that comprise and (re)produce the border-crossing movements of tourism labourers. If there is little attention to tourism-related labour mobilities, considerations related to the sustainability implications of migrant worker mobility are highlighted even less often. Salazar notes that despite the anthropocentric focus of sustainability as a concept, surprisingly little attention has been devoted to the aspect of social sustainability.

The contributions to this special issue provide thought-provoking insights concerning intersections of tourism and migration within the context of sustainable development. However, many gaps in existing knowledge remain (Santos et al., 2019). Tourism scholars are therefore prompted to further explore the impact of migrants and immigrant workers on destinations more widely, which extends to community relations, labour markets, place image and identities (Janta & Lugosi, 2022). Importantly, future research on migration and tourism, which considers the social sustainability of destinations, must remain conscious of

the global unevenness and inequality in all forms of human movement and labour (Salazar, 2020). Scholars also need to understand migration and tourism in a more nuanced way, by examining the complex local situations, cultural dynamics and geopolitical issues (Adams, 2020). More broadly, there is work to be done to revise “Western-generated one-size-fits all tourism models, categories, and understandings” (Adams, 2020, p. 21). Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis revealed and accelerated challenges around migration, tourism and social sustainability, thus stressing the need to develop impact-oriented research that extends across social, political and economic domains and utilises interdisciplinary approaches.

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