

The Potential Benefits vs. the Less Visible Problems of Developing Tourism: Economic, Environmental, Sociological and Psychological Factors

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Abstract—The tourist industry has surpassed the \$1 trillion mark in verifiable income, at a global level. The inclusion of informal tourism, whilst difficult to accurately quantify, would nonetheless push that stellar figure much higher, making it one of, if not the most significant engine presently available to the world economy. One of tourism's major advantages is that it is based on services, rather than goods. As such, it is potentially less depleting of natural resources, and less toxic, than the manufacture of goods. It is therefore easy but potentially superficial and misleading to consider the industry as a model of environmental sustainability. This paper explores some of the economic problems with such a preconception. Its second concern is with the sociological and socio-psychological implications of the growth and universality of the industry. The two constructs which form the focus of our concern are trust and security. These are posited as socio-psychological variables which profoundly affect the quality of the tourist experience; and ultimately both the total quantity of global income generated, and in terms of social sustainability, its distribution among the tourist industry work force. Whilst trust is considered mostly from a psychological and small group perspective, security is analyzed at the personal level and that of the local community and national society, from a sociological perspective. Finally some implications of its impact on the physical and economic domains are examined (the growth of the 'security industry' as a specific example).

A number of conclusions are drawn from the above analysis, and tentative recommendations made.

Keywords— Tourism, sustainability, trust, security

I. INTRODUCTION

IT is tempting to attempt a Balance Sheet of the debits and credits associated with the growth of the global tourist industry, which has been staggering during the past couple of decades. However reducing its pluses and minuses to a financial quantification may be facile at best, misleading at worst. It is therefore the intention of this paper to address issues relating to tourism, and its probable continuing trajectory, via four separate but interconnected perspectives: economic, environmental, sociological and psychological.

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II. ECONOMIC –BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS

According to reliable official sources, (World Bank, 2014), the tourist industry has now overtaken the armaments industry at a global level, and at \$1 trillion would rank as one of the largest economies of the world, if it were a Nation State. As an industry, it may act as a more valuable driver than others, including for example armament manufacturing, since a large proportion of tourist industry suppliers fit into the SME category (small and medium enterprises), whilst 'defence industry' supply tends to be more concentrated, with a small number of incumbents providing a large proportion of the 'goods'. In terms of overall income distribution therefore, at both the national and global level, it is proposed that the tourist industry tends to spread the wealth more than industries of similar size –the pharmaceutical and legal drug industry included, with its relatively concentrated group of suppliers, and cluster of ancillary enterprises.

The informal sector of the economy tends to be more significant, the less economically developed the nation state. Again, it is argued that due to the individual and relatively short-term nature of the services provided, the informal sector is able to reap benefits not available to industries dependent on advanced technologies, where the capital and knowledge worker base required are both substantial, and again concentrated. Tuk tuk drivers, massage workers, 'escorts' and small, private guest houses providing low-cost accommodation –all derive income from tourism, which through Keynesian multiplier effects will be redistributed through more of the economy (Keynes, 1936); since many of the suppliers are unable or unwilling to save, consumption is likely to be bolstered by such informal economic activities, and to keep in check the current concerns of deflation –not just in Europe (Greece, Spain etc.), but at a global level. Many of the benefits small-scale capitalism envisaged by Adam Smith (Smith 1776), and updated by Schumacher 2 centuries later, (Schumacher, 1972), could be attributed to the economic nature of this growing trillion dollar industry!

The service focus of tourism could also be argued to minimize the adverse effects (the "bads") of the "goods"

produced in manufacturing industries. Clearly the armaments industry is intended to injure/kill some portion of the human population –that is its principal *raison d'être*. The costs are, felicitously to itself, not borne by the industry, but remain “economic externalities”. The number of lost working days (production and GDP foregone), due to injuries and deaths, and hence foreshortened productive life, are not factored into the net contribution of this industry to global GDP. That type of actuarial calculus ascribes no value to the amount of human suffering “sustained” by victims, their families and community, and even the killers, who now are increasingly recognized as suffering psychological injuries as perpetrators!! Similar analysis might be used to reduce the net economic benefits of the vehicle manufacturing industry, reducing its aggregate contribution by the costs of collision injuries/deaths, pollution, loss of urban space due to parking, and ex-urban space due to vehicle dumping, etc.

Tourism would therefore emerge from this type of economic analysis as a white lamb of service, compared to the black sheep profiles of some of the principal drivers from the manufacturing sector. What, if any, are its ‘downsides’?

III. ECONOMIC PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE TOURIST INDUSTRY

One of its major problems is inherent in one of the principal benefits outlined above –its role as a driver in the informal sector of the economy. By definition the informal sector remains more or less outside the purview of public sector scrutiny and control –not completely, since legislation can be enacted to impose some degree of consumer (=tourist) protection. However laws written do not equate to laws enforced. Again, consumer safety is more an issue when the scale of the enterprise militates against the possibility of surveillance and legal redress –e.g. renting of unsafe equipment and vehicles; employment of unsafe operators (impaired boat operators etc.); taxi drivers indulging in overt or covert ‘fare gouging’ (deliberately circumnavigating destinations etc.). One could argue that, so long as no significant injury is sustained by the consumer, the re-distribution of income from tourist to service provider still represents a net gain to the economy –however short-term gain may well be offset by longer-time reluctance on the part of some tourists adversely targeted, to subject themselves to a repetition of economic exploitation, and thus to boycott not just the specific provider, but a much wider group of tourist service providers; or ultimately a specific destination and/or country as a whole. Blatant financial cheating and robbery/theft might provide such trigger effects.

Tax loss, related to the functioning of the informal sector, represents a problem at least as serious as those outlined above. It has been argued that much of the difference between the growth rates of China and India can be attributed to the loss of fiscal income due to the disproportionate size of the informal sector, in the Indian economy, which has seriously undermined its ability to finance much-needed infrastructure

development. By and large, (with notable exceptions of oil-rich Middle-Eastern States), governments depend on their tax base to function, and provide essential services, let alone the physical apparatus needed to promote economic growth. To the extent that SME’s avoid being caught in the tax net, they thwart national government attempts to reduce the cycle of poverty endemic to the most impoverished countries. Thus to the extent that a nation’s tourist industry is in the hands of the informal sector, there exists a more or less deliberate evasion of its fiscal responsibility; without which the rest of the economy is deprived of a valuable contribution. This would seem to be less of a problem for example in Canada, which is not heavily dependent on its tourism income, and which has in any case a relatively small informal sector, compared for example to Nicaragua, where the reverse would seem to hold. Thailand might fall between these 2 extremes.

IV. TOURISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT

It may be more useful to outline some of the downsides of a significant influx of tourism on the environment, but to propose that the possibility exists that, in order to ‘kill the goose that lays the golden egg’, either the market in a liberal democracy, or the executive, in a centralized authoritarian regime, will reduce polluting agents, or at least those most affecting the tourist population. Illustrations are in order. In Costa Rica, one of the heaviest concentrations of tourism in the past decade and a half has centred in the Province of Guanacaste, with its epicentre the former tiny fishing hamlet of Tamarindo. During the ensuing construction boom of hotels, plazas and condos built for ‘gringos’, the tourist population far exceeded that of the original residents. Environmental despoliation ensued. Pollutions included contamination of drinking water and the sewerage system, noise, traffic gridlock in and out of town, and excessive noise, in a previously tranquil environment. The financial crisis of 2008-9 led to an abrupt halt of the boom. It also provided a time for reflection and re-evaluation among those who survived the slump –Tico and Gringo alike. Substantial effort was put into ‘clean-up’. Water was divided into three qualities: black water, not suitable for drinking; water suitable for Tico consumption, and water purified to a level suitable for Gringo consumption. Raw sewerage was no longer permitted to be dumped into the ocean. The mud road, made virtually impassable during the rainy season, was finally replaced by a twentieth century hard surface model.

What a small town in a small country was able to achieve is far less replicable in its capital San Jose –far less easy perhaps in Bangkok/ Chiang Mai, Mexico City/Cancun, London/ Bournemouth (capitals and tourist-oriented towns respectively). However, some of the principles remain the same. San Jose remains toxic in the extreme –ambient, noise and visual pollution are still rampant. However, as Costa Rica has become increasingly aware at a Government level of the enormous economic benefits of tourism, more public money has gone towards clean-up of its capital, or at least those parts

most visible to the casual tourist. The benefits improve the quality of life of tourist and resident alike, since they are long-term. Infrastructure improvements include converting major and saturated traffic arteries in the CBD (central business district) into pedestrian-only walkways. Although not as huge and densely populated as Bangkok, London has curbed much of its ambient pollution in its CBD by imposing heavy costs for driving private vehicles within the cordoned area, at the same time as heavily promoting the use of the nineteenth century innovative vehicle of locomotion –the bicycle, which has gained a new lease on life, and been transformed from a symbol of low status and working class indigence, into a luxury high-tech status symbol –infusing new life into its riders and the greener urban economy! Tourists in London benefit as much as long-term residents. The London smog which notoriously killed thousands in the 50s, is a thing of the past! It is still very much a present environmental condition in Chiang Mai. How much this environmental condition alone curbs tourists, and/or their length of stay, is difficult to quantify. It is suggested there is some effect. Olfactory senses due to malfunctioning sewerage systems are endemic in both Bangkok and Chiang Mai. Again the costs in terms of curtailed tourist stays are in need of lengthy quantitative research – outside the scope of this short and discursive essay. That is not to say the exercise would not be valuable, for future tourism planning in Thailand.

V. SOCIOLOGICAL UPS AND DOWNS!

First some positive dimensions of tourism from a sociological perspective:

1/ introduction and/or orientation of tourist to a wider framework of reference than that to which s/he is accustomed (the time-honoured ‘voyage of discovery’).

Concomitant with this potential social and cultural re-orientation would be:

2/ the possible exposure to more or less significant differences in a/ patterns of behavior, b/ norms –explicit and implicit within behavior, c/ values as reflected in a/ and b/. In some societies clues to the foregoing will be quite covert: the social mask will be the norm covering the real attitudes, behavior and values of the host population: for example in Japan, guests are treated with great courtesy and seeming deference; yet it is difficult for a tourist as an outsider to penetrate the cultural wall. Clearly this is in part due to a linguistic barrier; but it is also due to covert characteristics in that host society. Tourists inevitably feel some sense of exclusion from familiarity, let alone intimacy, within the context of a new host society; however the degree to which that society permits overt expression, or conversely only sanctions covert expression of behavior, will determine the degree to which a tourist enjoys a socially enriching experience through his ‘travel adventure’. Thailand despite linguistic barriers similar to those in Japan, would seem to embrace diversity of experience, ethnicity, and sexual orientation in a way which would be inclusive for tourists, at

least at a superficial level. For many this might be sufficient. Pondering the authenticity of such inclusion might lead to questioning the reasons therefor –which might be primarily economic. Thailand is a poorer country than Japan, and possibly many may feel the exigencies of everyday existence justify an attenuation of traditional values; or not!

From the tourist (consumer’s) perspective, this same potential of attenuation of preconceived values and norms may lead to a relaxation of self-censure –again with potentially positive outcomes –self-discovery being an important possibility. Witnessing thousands of ‘normal’ everyday persons, of all ages and sizes and levels of fitness, congregating daily at dusk in Lumpini Park, may well provide guests in the society to ‘take a plunge’ in virtual anonymity, and engage with minimal inhibition in aerobics, or walking backwards, or running, or weightlifting –all of which activities are engaged in by multitudes of ‘host society’ persons. However, attempts to be included in a small group may result in explicit exclusion: witness one tourist who asked to join a yoga group of 8-10 persons, and was denied permission. The tourist was male, the other ‘yogis’ all female. As an outsider, it was impossible to know whether the exclusionary divide was linguistic, cultural, gender-based, or (more probably perhaps) a blend of all three. Tourist explorations inevitably create double-edged swords!

VI. SOME SOCIOLOGICAL DOWNSIDES

i/ The marketing of goods and services which would be left outside the market system, if tourism were not such a potent force. Examples abound: illegal trafficking of endangered species and parts (ivory and rhinoceros tusks, sharks fins, whale parts etc.); sexual slavery and quasi slavery, esp. of young children of both sexes (this has grown exponentially at an international level, despite an almost global ban under the law for such trafficking –one estimate puts the number of slaves in the tens of millions –the highest level in world history!); trafficking of illegal drugs and proliferation of substance abuse.

ii/ The potential reduction of the tourist experience to the lowest common denominator, resulting in a superficial experience for the majority of tourists

iii/ Expectations of standard quality serving to reduce the diversity of experience: e.g. the ‘Ramadaization’ of hotels, through chain proliferation; the ‘McDonaldization’ of food and ‘Starbuckization’ of coffee and soft drinks

iv/ the packaging of tours, and therefore of tourists: e.g. the coach tours from Toronto to Niagara Falls; from Sydney city centre to Bondi Beach (less than 10 km away!)

Whilst the above provides specific problem areas, in a more general sense the two most insidious downsides, from a sociological perspective, lie in:

a/ the potential loss of individuality and authentic uniqueness on the part of the host society, in its attempt to gain global popularity. The breathtaking tranquil beauty of New Zealand’s South Island is now being aggressively marketed as the home of the Hobbits. Mount Everest has by some accounts been

converted into a gigantic garbage dump, as part of the price of attracting tourists; and

b/ the turning of both tourist consumers and private individual tourism suppliers into commodities, where the medium of exchange is not cultural or social but increasingly financial.

It is apparent how the lines between environmental, economic and sociological concerns get blurred, once one delves into the practical 'nitty gritty' of the global tourist experience.

VII. PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES OF THE TOURIST

A tourist's mental/emotional state on arrival at a new and strange destination may be thought to go through a three-stage process:

Dis-orientation -> Transition -> Re-orientation

A simple model would convey some of the major dimensions:

DISORIENTATION	TRANSITION	RE-ORIENTATION
Spatial	Anchoring/grounding	Familiarity
Temporal	Time/physiolog'l adjustmt	Acceptance of new time zone
Linguistic	Learning 'survival' terms	Minimum working vocab for comm'n
Financial	cash transactions/exchange	control of finances
Economic	daily cost familiarity	cost/revenues comfort zone
Social	establishing some connexions	inclusion by host groups

Some of the possible psychological states which a tourist might go through, in the above orientation process, could include positive and/or negative continua, e.g.:

Curiosity; excitement; contentment; elation; ecstasy; euphoria (positive emotions)

Or alternatively

Apathy; indifference; suspicion; cynicism; fear; anxiety; paranoia; depression (negative states)...TBC!

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