# Concluding remarks. Towards enabling sustainable visits

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As highlighted in the introductory chapter, tourism and visiting, in the forms we see around us today, must change fundamentally if we are to honour Agenda 2030, Paris Climate Accords (2015) and the agreements of the Glasgow Climate Pact (2021). Without doubt, now is the time to consider how we can continue to meet without the devastating ecological footprints caused by today's tourism. To meet and interact as guest-host and visitor-visited needs to continue, as such meetings are essential for human civilisations all around the world. The question raised in this book is how these interactions and relations can be facilitated while prioritising the sustainability challenges we currently are facing.

Considering the variety of actors presented in the book – from the small bricolage entrepreneurs and the voluntary organisations such as the association behind the Medieval Week, to the large publicly financed organisations – the interests and perceptions of what is important in societies vary, and are at times in stark contrast to each other. Who shall be given voice when the ideas of what sustainability is can be interpreted and voiced in so many different ways? Hence, how can sustainable visits be enabled and by whom?

One way is to promote the efforts of actors who consciously work with sustainability in different ways to become role models for others to mimic. Through mimetic behaviours, other actors can mirror these actors' ways of addressing sustainability goals and strategies. It is critical though that actors who work in the form of organisations not only develop strategies but develop management control sys-

tems if they wish to address and integrate sustainability within the entire organisation.

Another important aspect when enabling sustainable visits is how the destination is organised and how the resources in a place are managed and governed. Here, a public organisation may be involved as an initiator, but one actor is not enough if we are to reach an inclusive society that enables meetings and interactions in a place. Initiatives from local entrepreneurs that strive to run sustainable business are crucial, as well as inclusion of private organisations, citizens, and non-profit organisations. In that process, there is a need to balance the managing of a destination with the preservation and protection of cultural heritage. Furthermore, it is of great importance that destructive exploitation of resources is not allowed.

While mirroring can function as a channel for transferring best practices, in the book we have also argued for another form of mirroring. Entrepreneurs can, through cooperation, share experiences and learn from each other. Here, academia can become a facilitator by offering education on sustainability-related issues. Such education should emphasise the co-creation of knowledge through collaborations between academics and entrepreneurs. Furthermore, knowledge and learning can also play a key role in facilitating informed visits. Dark tourism is one example. Through educational learning visitors at disaster-related sites can become more aware of the interdependence between humanity and nature and create respect for the experiences people have of these disasters. Such informed visits can also be translated into other contexts and influence visitors' images and reproductions of a destination.

So where does this leave us? Are sustainable visits possible? A conclusion of this book is: yes, they are. Sustainable visits need to be based on an informed understanding of alternative routes forward. Co-creation of places into destinations through interaction between visitors-visited can enable us to choose paths that are different from stereotyped, undemocratic, and destructive visits.

Since destinations are produced, not discovered, tourism cannot be discussed without addressing ethics and moral issues about ownership, control, rights, exclusion and inclusion, us and them. In their different ways, the chapters in this anthology argue that to continue moving and meeting will require more of encountering, interacting, and listening, and less of gazing, reduction, stereotyping, and com-

modification, of destinations, visitors, and locals. This will require that both the visitors and the visited have enough power to control the narratives and images of themselves, which in turn will require profound changes in the industry that produce these narratives and images.

Fundamental conditions for enabling such changes are highlighted in Figure 2, in the introduction chapter. To enable sustainable visits, it will be necessary to initiate a dialogue that:

- focuses on how the visited, the locals, experience the place. These experiences are, to a large extent, defined by the living conditions, physical and tangible, as well as intangible.

In order to create an informed understanding, the dialogue also needs to address how visitors experience a place as a destination and how that may influence locals. Especially important is to highlight:

- when visitors come as tourists, they experience a place as a destination. Their relation to the destination is formed by images, stories, carefully selected artefacts, symbols, and resources provided at the place. The utilisation of these resources influences living conditions for the locals in several, and sometimes negative, ways.

This kind of dialogue can challenge the commonly dominant discourse of the need for growth. More tourists is not a way forward. On the other hand, a total stop or degrowth may also be devastating for some societies, especially for small developing societies that are dependent on visits. Alternative routes forward need to be found and defined. This will require dialogue and active decisions on how resources, intangible as well as tangible, are distributed in an inclusive way, yet safeguarded from exploitation of visitors and visited. To enable sustainable visits, a balance between the locals and their living conditions, and the visitors' expectations of a destination, must be established. Stereotypical images of destinations as escapes, remote pleasure peripheries and leisure heavens, need to change if gentrification, exploitation, or other negative effects of tourism are to be avoided. Going back to the beginning of this chapter, it is necessary to change the way people travel and consume destinations in order reduce the ecological footprints of people on the move. If this requires less in situ visitors, there will still be visitors! (And as is

argued in the book, since online places are also places, online visits are also visits!)

## Where to go from here?

Without doubt, transition to sustainability is the great challenge of our time – and a bigger step for humankind than any moon landing. Sustainability is a powerful concept, difficult and ambiguous, globalising and totalising, with an unusual agency and a pronounced moral, ethical and political charge. A core of its agency is a moral imperative that sets up the world as one, establishes a totalising "we" and compels us all to "act NOW or it will be too late"! This is a risky position. It is well known how such "we's" and the impetus to "act now!" only too easily sets reflection aside, reduces complexity and turns a blind eye to the consequences.

Still, as concerned individuals and researchers we believe that it is now due time to assume a more proactive approach and ask where to go from here and what to do. We need to find ways to be able to move and meet also in the future. "Sustainable visits" is intended as a reminder that in the transition to a sustainable world there are things to lose – and to win. In the same way as we will have to refrain from using antibiotics unless it is absolutely necessary, it seems likely that we all will have to refrain from mass tourism as we know it in order to cherish our ability to move and meet.

Today there is a growing resistance towards certain forms of tourism in more and more destinations, Visby and Gotland included. Venice, Mallorca, Barcelona and the Seychelles have recently introduced regulations of tourism, for the benefit of the locals and the environment. In many places in the Western world there is an even greater resistance towards other kinds of visitors, such as refugees and work migrants. What this tells us is that to be able to encounter people also in places where we may not be invited, or even wanted, we will need to engage with the locals and their understandings of what constitutes hosts and guests, and establish a social contract that not only regulates rights and obligations but also stipulates mutual recognition and respect.

A striking example doing just that is the Palau Pledge. Palau is a republic of around 340 islands in the Western Pacific, inhabited by 18,000 people.

Palau. Image courtesy of Sea Legacy, Cristina Mittermeier.

In 2017 Palau became the first nation to install immigration laws to protect its environment and culture.[1] Upon entry, visitors are requested to watch a short animated video and sign a passport pledge based on Palauan traditions and written with the help of Palau's children:

> Children of Palau, I take this pledge as your guest,
> to preserve and protect your beautiful and unique island home.
> I vow to tread lightly, act kindly, and explore mindfully.
> I shall not take what is not given.
> I shall not harm what does not harm me.
> The only footprints I shall leave are those that will wash away.

In condensed, poetic language this pledge summarises what a 'sustainable visit' can entail: to preserve, to protect, to explore mindfully, and to leave no remaining footprints.

1 https://palaupledge.com/; https://www.palaureg.com/the-palau-ship-registry/the-republic-of-palau/tourism/palau-pledge/