Ethics of Tourism: A horizon 2050 paper

Abstract:

Purpose:

This article is part of Horizon 2050 series of papers. It highlights the importance of stronger engagement with ethical philosophy in tourism. A number of potential research streams are identified.

Design:

The article first introduces several theories of ethics. It then reviews the history of tourism's engagement with ethics, especially within academia. Subsequently, several themes for the future of research on tourism ethics are discussed according to four scales: the tourist, tourism business, tourism destination and the tourism system.

Findings:

At the individual tourist level, future research should focus on better understanding tourist (un)ethical behaviour by considering the hedonic and cross-cultural nature of tourism. At business level, motivations to be ethical, ethical corporate models should be studied. Endurance of tourist products that are deemed unethical needs further analysis. At destination level, further understanding of stakeholder relations, stakeholder values and dissemination of those values is required. Fair and just options to sustainably manage visitation merit further discussion. At tourism system level, a stronger engagement with political philosophies and more creative alternatives for the current global tourism system require exploration.

Originality:

While several reviews of ethics of tourism research exist, this paper is oriented towards opportunities for future research. The paper does not intend to cover all current ethical debates, however it provides a number of topics within the tourism ethics field that merit further exploration in hope to inspire new research.

Keywords: ethics, politics, tourism system, horizon 2050, sustainability

目的：

本文是地平线 2050 系列论文的一部分。 它强调了在旅游业中加强参与道德哲学的重要性。 确定了许多潜在的研究方向。

设计：

文章首先介绍了伦理学的几种理论。 **然后回**顾了旅游业与道德的接触历史，特别是在学术界。 **随后，从游客、旅游企**业、旅游目的地和旅游系统四个层面讨论了旅游伦理研究未来的几个主题。

发现：

在个体游客层面，未来的研究应侧重于考虑旅游的享乐性和跨文化性质，更好地理解游客的（不）道德行为。 **在商**业层面，应该研究道德的动机、道德的企业模式。 **被**认为不道德的旅游产品的耐久性需要进一步分析。 **在目的地**层面，需要进一步了解利益相关者关系、利益相关者价值观以及这些价值观的传播。 **可持**续管理访问的公平公正的选择值得进一步讨论。 **在旅游系**统层面，需要探索更深入地参与政治哲学，并为当前的全球旅游系统提供更具创意的替代方案。

独创性：

虽然存在一些关于旅游研究伦理的评论，但本文面向未来研究的机会。 **本文并不打算涵盖当前所有的**伦理辩论，但它提供了旅游伦理领域内的一些值得进一步探索的主题，以期激发新的研究。

关键词：伦理、政治、旅游系统、2050 年地平线、可持续性

Propósito:

Este artículo forma parte de la serie de artículos Horizonte 2050. El estudio destaca la importancia de un mayor compromiso con la filosofía ética en el ámbito turístico. Se identifican una serie de posibles líneas de investigación.

Diseño:

En primer lugar, el artículo presenta varias teorías de la ética. Luego revisa la historia del compromiso del turismo con la ética, especialmente dentro del mundo académico. Posteriormente, se discuten varios temas para el futuro de la investigación sobre la ética turística según cuatro escalas: el turista, la empresa turística, el destino turístico y el sistema turístico.

Conclusiones:

A nivel de turista individual, las investigaciones futuras deberían centrarse en comprender mejor el comportamiento (no)ético de los turistas considerando la fundamentación hedónica e intercultural del turismo. A nivel empresarial se deben estudiar tanto las motivaciones para ser éticos, como los modelos corporativos éticos. Además, la perdurabilidad de productos turísticos que se consideran poco éticos necesita un análisis más profundo. A nivel de destino, se requiere una mayor comprensión de las relaciones con las partes interesadas, sus valores y la difusión de esos valores. Las opciones justas y equitativas para gestionar de forma sostenible las visitas merecen un debate más profundo. A nivel del sistema turístico, es necesario explorar un compromiso más fuerte con las filosofías políticas y alternativas más creativas para el actual sistema turístico global.

Originalidad:

Si bien existen varias revisiones de la ética de la investigación en turismo, este artículo está orientado hacia oportunidades para futuras investigaciones. El artículo no pretende cubrir todos los debates éticos actuales, sin embargo, proporciona una serie de temas dentro del campo de la ética del turismo que merecen una mayor exploración con la esperanza de inspirar nuevas investigaciones.

Palabras clave: ética, política, sistema turístico, horizonte 2050, sostenibilidad

Introduction

Every stakeholder involved in tourism constantly faces ethical dilemmas. Tourism as a liminal experience that is often set in cross-cultural environment further exacerbates the complexity of such dilemmas (Tolkach, 2023; Tolkach, Pratt & Zeng, 2017). Ethical concerns are also reflected in the decades of discussions regarding sustainable, responsible and regenerative tourism. Just prior to COVID-19 pandemic these discussions focused on issues created by overtourism: negative impacts of poorly planned high-volume tourism (Dodds & Butler, 2019). COVID-19 has brought tourism to a halt. Academics (e.g. Lew, Cheer, Haywood, Brouder & Salazar, 2020) and industry organisations (e.g. UNWTO, 2020) shifted their focus on how to 'build back better' tourism after the pandemic. However they are manifest, ethics of tourism will require much more focus moving forward.

What should good and right tourism look like? What moral challenges tourism faces now and in the future? What should various stakeholders do to be moral actors? This horizon 2050 paper discusses research opportunities to address these questions. The remainder of the paper is structured, as follows. First, the concepts of ethics are introduced. Then past and current debates in the ethics of tourism are provided. Ultimately, future research related to ethics of tourism is discussed at different scales, namely: the tourist, tourism business, tourist destination and tourism system.

Ethics Theories

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that aims to understand the nature of morality and the principles that can guide ethical decision-making (Benn, 1998). Meta-ethics studies the nature of morality. In meta-ethics, universalism suggests that all people are guided by the same ethical principles (Richardson & Williams, 2009). For example, the concept of reciprocity is common across cultures. Meanwhile, relativism suggests that cultural background and social norms guide one's ethics. For example, some societies may consider execution as an acceptable form of punishment, while others do not (Benn, 1998; Fennell, 2006a). Tourism context is particularly interesting from such relativist position, as travel often involves interactions between people from different cultures with different moral values.

Another branch of ethics, namely normative ethics, has a more applied angle as it focuses on the principles that ought to guide ethical decision-making. Normative ethical theories are commonly discussed in tourism studies. Much of tourism studies are engaged with descriptive ethics research which deliberates on normative ethical theories that explain moral reasoning for specific tourism scenarios or topics without researchers taking a position on what moral principle is right (e.g. Tolkach, et al., 2017; Winter, 2020). The two main streams within normative ethics are teleology and deontology. Teleology focuses on consequences of actions. A moral action is the one that maximises benefits to a person perpetrating the act (i.e.

egoism) or to the highest number of people (i.e. utilitarianism) (Bentham, 2008). On the contrary, deontology is principle rather than consequence oriented. Deontology focuses on duties or obligations one has to other individuals and society. According to Kant (2013), a morally right action is determined by principles that can be applied as a universal law. Teleology and deontology may come into conflict, when an action that is right in principle does not lead to the highest overall benefits. Arguably, there are situations where the means employed do not justify the ends pursued (Ronzoni, 2010). Justice is another important normative ethical concept, which is concerned with identifying rules that create a fair society. For example, distributive justice deliberates on what set of rules results in the fair distribution of benefits. Ultimately, just and fair rules should enable a society to maximise potential benefits and distribute them in a way that is seen as fair by the members of that society (Rawls, 1991; Ronzoni, 2010).

UNWTO (2019) Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics can be used to illustrate how different ethical theories manifest themselves in practice. For example, Article 4(2) provides a deontological statement: "Tourism activities should be conducted in harmony with the attributes and traditions of the host regions and countries and in respect for their laws, practices and customs". Article 11(4) is utilitarian as it aims to maximise a certain benefit, i.e. freedom of travel: "Administrative procedures relating to border crossings … should be adapted, so far as possible, so as to facilitate to the maximum freedom of travel…". Article 12(6) appeals to distributive justice as follows: "Partnership and the establishment of balanced relations between enterprises of generating and receiving countries contribute to the sustainable development of tourism and an equitable distribution of the benefits of its growth."

Evolution of ethics in tourism

Historically, tourism ethics have been concerned primarily with the ethics of hospitality, i.e. the duty of a host to welcome travelers. Lashley (2014) notes that hospitality customs are evident throughout human history and across geographies and religions. Hospitality can be seen as a duty to welcome others that can be motivated by a fear of retaliation from authorities or god(s), by an expectation of reciprocity, by gaining benefits by being seen virtuous, or by one's altruism (Telfer, 2000).

Since the emergence of modern commercial tourism and until now, host-guest relations remain important, however the welfare of both tourists and host residents is discussed with increasingly more concern towards the community impacts of tourism. In the late 19th century the focus was on the tourist. César Ritz' motto was "the customer is never wrong" (Hosco, n.d.), which underpinned the importance of satisfying guests' needs. As tourism sector grew, it was promoted as a vehicle for socio-economic development of developing countries. In the first issue of *Tourism Review (*then *The Tourist Review*) there were calls to build back better tourism, however at that time it meant rebuilding the tourism infrastructure of higher quality than pre-war, and reducing bureaucracy involved in cross-border travel (Bridges, 1946), i.e. stimulating tourism.

By 1980s, it became apparent that not all tourism is equally beneficial, and unlimited tourism growth may not be desired. Ethical concerns shifted towards planning and development of tourism. Indeed, 1980 AIEST conference was themed "Limit to tourism development", and it recommended: "…regard for fundamental ecological laws, and the consideration of the

interests and cultures of the host populations, be regarded as imperative rules governing the implantation as well as the development of tourism" (Jafari, 1981). Recognition that state involvement, control and regulation of leisure and tourism are philosophical and ethical concerns emerged at AIEST conference the following year (Middleton, 1981).

Consequently, discussions of alternative forms of tourism (i.e. alternatives to mass tourism) emerged. Smaller scale locally owned or controlled tourism developments have been proposed as better options of tourism. This was seen especially relevant for developing countries, where mass tourism development resulted in neocolonial dependency with developing countries becoming leisure peripheries (Britton, 1983; Britton, 1987; Gonsalves, 1987). From deontological perspective, community control sets a principle that tourism should follow. From utilitarian perspective, tourism should be able to provide better outcomes. From justice perspective, these benefits should be distributed fairly.

Since 1980s ethics of tourism have become intertwined with sustainable and responsible tourism. Lea (1995) has discussed travel ethics from the perspective of tourist behaviour, while suggesting travel organisations have responsibility to provide ethical experiences and travel literature should educate tourists about appropriate behaviour. Furthermore, Hultsman (1995) conceptualised just tourism framework that considers ecological impacts, marketing, sustainable development, humanistic and social concerns, and education. Weeden (2002) provided a business case for ethical tourism as a niche product.

Further discussions around tourism ethics involved emergence of codes of conduct (Payne & Dimanche, 1996). Malloy & Fennell (1998) in their review of codes of ethics in tourism concluded that the majority of statements were deontological rather than teleological, thus focusing on principles of appropriate tourism development and behaviour, while lacking focus on the desired consequences of tourism. Advocacy for a high-level international code of conduct in tourism resulted in World Tourism Organization's Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (UNWTO, 1999), which later became UNWTO's (2019) first convention: The UNWTO Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics.

Arguably, the scholarship of tourism ethics remained marginal and fragmented until the publication of Fennell's (2006a) book *Tourism Ethics*. The book integrates a range of philosophical theories and concepts together with applied tourism issues. Within the last two decades a wide range of tourism issues have been discussed from ethical perspectives. Lovelock & Lovelock (2013) demonstrate how diverse ethical issues are in tourism, including: borders, human rights, indigenous people, climate change, disability, labour. Host-guest relationship remained central in discussions of tourism ethics, and assumed the need for reciprocal altruism between the two groups, which is challenging to achieve due to limited interactions individual tourists have with specific local residents or tourism employees (Fennell, 2006b).

Since 2000s and in particular in 2010s, tourism presented a context for exploration of animal ethics. Tourism has a significant opportunity to contribute to issues of animal rights as many tourists are motivated to interact with animals in a tourism setting. However, tourism practices are generally anthropocentric in viewing animals as a resource to be used for human benefit (Winter, 2020). Even within sustainable tourism and ecotourism discourse such an approach is common despite the claims for care for nature. Thus, utilitarian logic largely prevails in practice, albeit it is heavily critiqued in academic literature (Fennell, 2012). Cultural differences with regards to views on animal rights further complicate matters as

worldviews and the place of non-human animals in them may differ between tourist-generating regions and tourist destination regions (Cui & Xu, 2019).

As research into tourism ethics progressed four different units of analysis emerged:

- *The global tourism system*. Research at this level is often conceptual and deals with the structural issues of tourism. It considers how tourism can be changed as a system to be ethical or just (e.g. Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; Jamal & Higham, 2021).
- *Destination*. While research at this level exposes structural issues of tourism, it tends to be more empirical. It may demonstrate how unethical or unjust tourism affects places and communities or investigate impacts of a specific ethical issue (e.g. Last Chance Tourism) (e.g. Dawson et al., 2011; Jamal & Camargo, 2013).
- *Individual business*. This research examines an individual business's level of commitment to ethical behaviour in tourism and how staff of tourism businesses perceive what is ethical (e.g. Bowles & Ruhanen, 2014; Fennell & Malloy, 1999).
- *Tourist*. Studies at individual tourist level focus on ethical tourist behaviour and their interactions with hosts (e.g. Loi & Pearce, 2015).

Cohen (2018) concludes that a considerable progress on ethics in tourism has been made with regards to issues of hedonism, justice and compassion. Yet, more profound ethical issues related to the nature of tourism as a social phenomenon require further investigation. This sentiment echoes earlier Caton's (2012) discussion of the moral turn in tourism studies. Caton (2012) suggests that much of engagement between ethics and tourism research has been instrumental and reactive, i.e. taking incremental steps to improve tourism without engaging philosophically with the meaning of "good" and "right". Li (2021) suggests that the lack of progress towards ethical tourism is due to a lack of an appropriate philosophical underpinning for ethical tourism studies. Li (2021) proposes that critical realism paradigm can guide research into morally right and socially acceptable interactions in tourism.

COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the reduction of international visitor arrivals by 72% in 2020 and 69% in 2021 compared to 2019 (UNWTO, 2023). Domestic tourism has been heavily affected as well. While recognising that tourism will be back once pandemic is over, various experts, governments and organisations urged to re-imagine tourism of the future. Much of such discussions focused on how to make tourism sustainable, regenerative and responsible. Thus, ethics of tourism will continue to play an important role.

Is Ethical Tourism on the Horizon?

Tourism ethics is a growing field within tourism studies, as can be observed from the 'ethics' and 'tourism' keyword search on Scopus database. The role of tourism in the society and tourism's impacts on society and the environment are highly debated, as established earlier in this paper. It is thus important to contemplate, what issues need to be addressed and informed by an ethical lens for tourism of the future. The remainder of this paper attempts to do so and discusses future tourism ethics research needs according with the above scales: tourist, tourist business, tourist destination and tourism system.

The tourist

This section is primarily concerned with ethics of tourist behaviour. It is important to reinforce here that in many cases there is no definitive answer to what an ethical action is. In this paper, unless otherwise stated, ethical action is the one that is the most acceptable to the

majority of a destination's local residents, if the residents' attitude is based on full knowledge about that action, while also benefitting tourists and not harming the physical environment. This section discusses influences of relativist and egoistic nature of tourism and of rational and irrational ethical decision-making processes on tourists' ethical decision-making.

Ethics of tourist behaviour at an individual's level possesses great opportunity to advance knowledge about ethics if relativist nature of ethics is assumed (Tolkach, Pratt & Zeng, 2017). How does one make ethical judgment outside their usual environment? What is considered moral in one society is not necessarily moral in another. In the decade prior to COVID-19, international travel demand has been diversifying. As new tourist-generating markets emerged, particularly in Asia, many travellers were travelling internationally for the first time. They would bring their ethical norms from different cultures to destination. Such situations may lead to a clash of civilisations, affecting the quality of life of both host communities and tourists (Tolkach & Pratt, 2021). In such situations tourism operators and destination planners need to consider how to reduce the potential for a clash of civilisations. Should this be done via design, separating tourism markets based on seasonality, should destinations and operators invest in educating tourists regarding appropriate behaviour, or should residents adapt to tourists' (un)ethical behaviour? Li, Hazra & Wang (2023) provide an example how such questions may be answered by studying structural and agential mechanisms that lead to "civilised tourism in China". Post COVID-19 destinations invest in diversification of their tourist markets, thus the potential for clashes of civilisations not only between hosts and guests, but also between different visitor markets increases and constantly changes. Further research is required to address such issues in relativist ethics.

Furthermore, more research is required to understand how tourist behaviour can be shaped to ensure barriers to acting in ethical manner are overcome, and tourists make responsible choices. Much of tourism is egoistic in its nature (McKercher, 2015). Individuals choose to travel to maximise their own benefits. In tourism context, akrasia, i.e. restraint of own desires that leads to irrational actions, is a challenge (Fennell, 2015). Even for voluntourism, tourist motivations include seeking novelty, adventure and professional development, not just altruism (Francis & Yasué, 2019). Thus, behaving ethically in accordance to destination's social norms may be a barrier to achieving one's desires. To complicate matters more, tourists may not even act according to the ethical standards they impose on themselves at their place of usual residence. Tourism is a liminal experience where one may feel liberated from the social constraints of their usual environment (e.g. being afraid their family or work colleagues find out about their inappropriate behaviour) (McKercher, 2015). Thus, they may engage in behaviour they believe is deemed unacceptable in their own culture while on holidays.

Ethical decision-making process includes awareness that one is facing an ethical dilemma. Analysis of different factors that result in an ethical judgment, i.e. does the individual deem an action ethically acceptable, takes place first. Then the individual acts either according to their ethical judgment, or against their judgment due to other considerations (e.g. one may recognise queue jumping is bad, but may still do so to get service quicker). Even when one is aware they face an ethical issue, two gaps need to be addressed: awareness-attitude gap and attitude-behaviour gap (Pratt & Tolkach, 2023). Media articles, awareness campaigns and information provided directly to tourists reduce the awareness-attitude gap assist tourists in making a sound judgment regarding the most ethically acceptable course of action. As demonstrated by Expedia (2022) and Booking.com (2022) reports, there is now a general

concern amongst travellers about sustainability. Attitude-behaviour gap is however much more challenging to bridge. Previous studies suggest tourists may employ a wide range of neutralisation techniques to justify for themselves and for others why their actions are ethical (Pratt & Tolkach, 2023). Further studies should be undertaken to address this gap. For example, how communication can pre-empt potential neutralisation tactics? Moreover, Viglia & Acuti (2023) suggest empirical studies need to be designed to allow observing behaviour and to consider issues of relative value of sustainability (e.g. other attributes of a trip may be perceived more important than sustainability), rationality (i.e. consumer behaviour often depends on perceptual interpretations) and social desirability bias (i.e. people tend to declare their intention to be sustainable as they see such claims to be socially desirable).

Another strategy to reduce unethical tourist behaviour is through making it more difficult to undertake an unethical action (Dolnicar, 2020). However, creating barriers to and punishment for unethical or even illegal behaviour, still does not eliminate such behaviours even if they benefit neither the perpetrators of the act nor others (Pratt & Tolkach, 2022). Mostly, attempts to address tourist behaviour that may have negative impacts on destinations attempt to establish rules, or social contract, and thus are deontological. However, it may pay off to use utilitarian logic to nudge tourists towards ethical behaviour through both fines (or other monetary costs) and incentives (e.g. discounted prices). However, as often is the case with utilitarianism, valuing various benefits and costs is challenging. I.e. what is the fair compensation for local residents in a neighbourhood not getting a good night's sleep because of rowdy tourists, and whose account that compensation should be paid to?

As research in ethical tourist behaviour progresses, it is important to ensure such research is set in context. Tourists do not make decisions in vacuum, they are guided by their own cultural and social background, their current circumstances, including why and who with they are travelling, and their environment (Tolkach, Pratt & Zeng, 2017). It is also important not to make generalisations about a group of travellers based on a single variable, e.g. nationality. Societies are not homogenous, and personal values that guide ethical behaviour may vary greatly within a society. This is exemplified by the US population division towards travel post-COVID-19 pandemic along their political preferences (Vukomanovic et al., 2022). Clashes of different principles and valuations of outcomes in tourism-specific scenarios require further investigation.

Tourism business

This section discusses tourism businesses' motivation to be ethical and the progress towards more radical change in businesses practices required to embrace ethics. What makes a tourism business ethical remains inconclusive. One of the interesting debates is the importance of intent to be ethical. Does it matter whether an organisation is intrinsically motivated to be ethical? If organisation acts according to the highest standards of corporate social responsibility to gain a competitive advantage rather than to make world a better place, is it truly ethical? A utilitarian approach would look at the outcomes of a business' operation to determine, whether it is ethical, irrespective of the motivation to produce such outcomes. In conjunction with distributive justice, such approach would look at not only whether the positive outcomes are maximised, while negative outcomes are minimised, but also consider how fair is the distribution of benefits and costs across stakeholders. Assuming the trend for an increasing number of travellers to prefer sustainable products continues (Booking.com, 2022; Expedia, 2022), the motivation for companies to be ethical is of low relevance.

However, if the trend reverses, ethical business practices would be abolished if they do not lead to the highest profit or provide competitive advantage. If businesses are externally motivated to be ethical, then further studies should focus on consumer ethical attitudes and behaviour, and the business sector will follow the market.

What makes a tourism business ethical? Businesses can be placed on a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) continuum from having a minimalist approach (i.e. maximising the profit is the only corporate responsibility) to being a social activist (i.e. not only operating to highest ethical standards but also promoting change in other organisations) (Ashley & Haysom, 2006). The social consensus appears moving towards a more radical/activist approach: from doing no harm to benefiting communities and the environment. Hence, the rise of regenerative tourism that is meant to positively impact destinations (e.g. Becken & Kaur, 2021). Increasingly, organisations declare that they are for benefit organisations by. for example, using B Corporation (Travel by B Corp, n.d.) framework or reorganise to be a social enterprise. This requires a variety of stakeholders groups, not just shareholders, to be involved in corporate governance. However, many large scale, multinational corporations involved in tourism have not undergone such transformation yet. Will that occur, and if so, what is the pathway for such corporate transformation is worth discussing.

Not all tourist-oriented products are equally (un)ethical. Some have a longer list of issues than others. For example, cruise line companies operating large ships have long been criticised for both environmental and social issues (Heacox, 2021). Will they have a place in an ethical tourism of future? Will the owners decide to liquidate their business or will they transform their core product? Endurance of tourism products and businesses that are largely deemed unethical is puzzling.

Tourism destination

Tourism businesses take clues regarding what is ethical from their clientele (tourists) and from places where they operate (destinations). Stakeholder analyses and research into destination planning and management have been prolific in recent years, with focus on the justice of destination governance and management, i.e. what the fair principles of tourism development are at a destination (Dawson et al., 2011; Jamal & Camargo, 2013). However, power relations in destinations are complex and are seldom critically examined (Stilling Blichfeldt, Hird & Kvistgaard, 2014). Further research on power relations is thus required. Who holds the power over decisions related to social contract of tourism development? Do neocolonial and imperialist relations in tourism persist (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2022)? Does the central government have the leadership role as it legislates immigration, labour, business policies? Do community organisations and local residents through a collective voice have the power to direct tourism development in the way they see fit? Or perhaps customer is never wrong, thus the collective tourist has the ultimate power to steer tourism development?

One of the proposed core principles is that the local residents of a destination should have control over tourism development. If the aim of ethical tourism is to improve local residents' quality of life, this seems reasonable. However, community knowledge regarding tourism impacts may be lacking, as well as the capacity to develop tourism (Moscardo & Murphy, 2014). Awareness raising, training, education and consultancies can all help address that, but then will tourism be developed according to values of community residents or those that trained the residents? It is often assumed that rural communities in so-called developing countries would like to own and manage homestays or community-based lodges to attract

tourists interested in culture and nature (Tolkach, King & Pearlman, 2013). What if their preference is to be frontline staff in a big casino, where there is greater revenue generated and staff get regular wages without the risk of business ownership? Will educators, consultants and Non-Government Organisations be content with such preferences, even if they believe small scale community-based tourism is better suited? Further research should address the origin and dissemination of values related to tourism development through communities. Moreover, further discussion and reflection on tourism academics' values and activism guiding their research is required (Schweinsberg & Fennell (2024).

A common strategy proposed for sustainable destination management is to attract high-yielding tourists, thus reducing the number of visitors in a destination, but maximising their expenditure (e.g. Australian Trade and Investment Commission, 2023; Maharani, 2023). However, focus on high-yield travellers may lead to exclusivity of destinations and accessibility of transformational experiences based on income (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2019). While tourism remains a privilege, it has been made much more accessible in recent decades. Is it fair to make it again exclusive, even if the objective is to limit negative impacts to destinations? If it is not, what are the better principles to guide destination management to be both fair and sustainable? Further exploration of a just way to limit visitation while maximising benefits of visitation for visitors, communities and the physical environment is required.

Tourism system

Since 1980s there have been calls to re-imagine tourism to address its negative impacts and ensure it benefits places and communities. Yet, in 2020s tourism system has not fundamentally changed. The most dramatic changes are related to information and communication technologies rather than ethics. There definitely has been a change towards inclusion of sustainability concerns at destination and business levels (Booking.com, 2022; Expedia, 2022). However, clearly unethical practices such as zero-dollar tours that rely on forcing tourists to shop at specific businesses have also emerged (Shoowong, 2023). Climate change is making some tourists wary about long haul travel and their contribution to carbon emissions (Andersen, 2022). However, other tourists embark on last chance tours to visit places that are bound to transform or disappear due to climate change, despite that travel to those destinations, e.g. the Arctic, contributes to the problem (Dawson et al., 2011).

There is plenty of commentary regarding the need for change from academia, media, governments, industry and international organisations. Yet, changes appear incremental. Tourism system appears to be in an equilibrium position. There is of course a sense of inertia when it comes to ethics. The status quo is typically an accepted scenario. It is a familiar one. On the contrary, change may be scary. This ethical inertia has been discussed outside of tourism (Schaffer, 2004), however its investigation within tourism context also has merit.
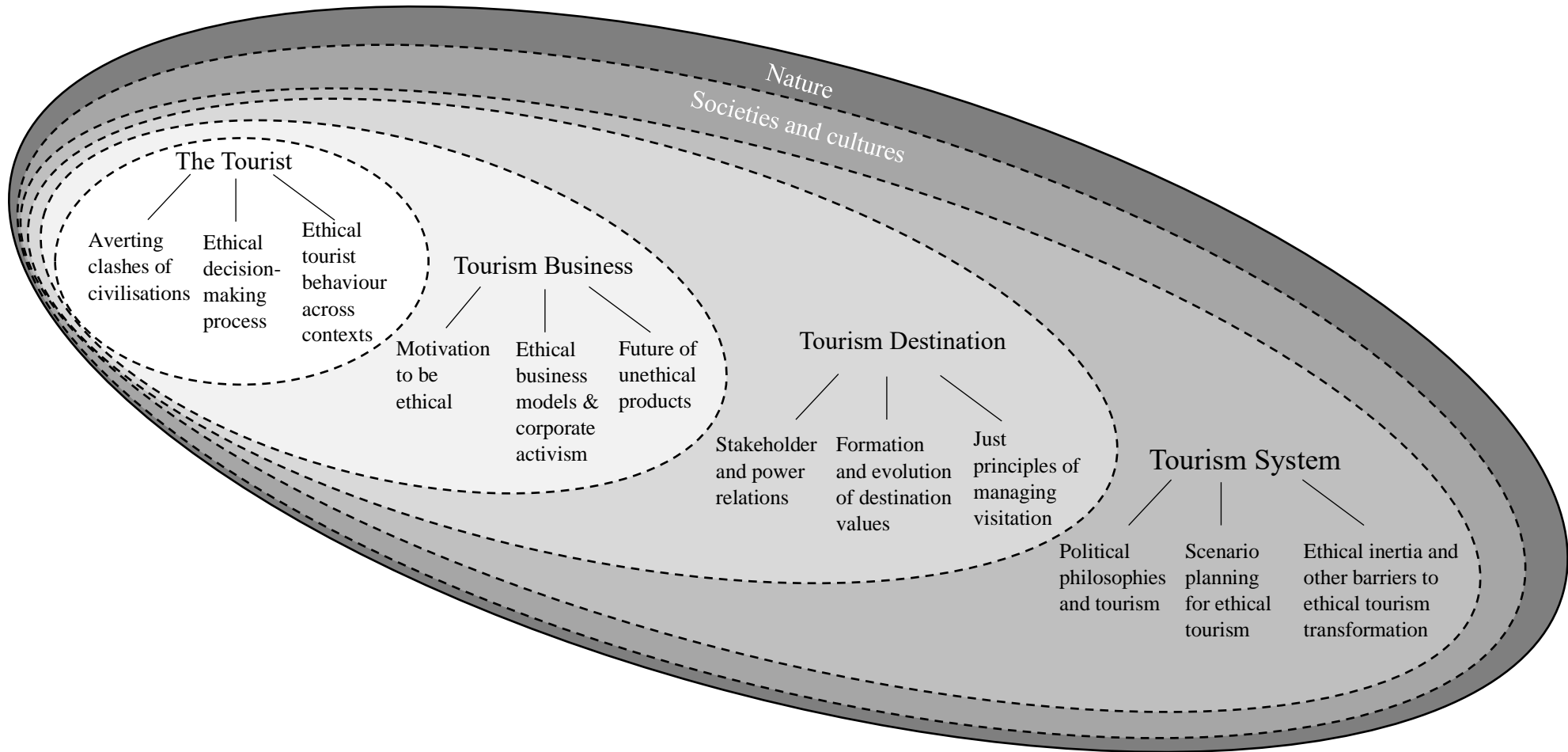
Another issue is perhaps that organisations discussing changes to tourism system use a radical language, e.g. "re-imagining", "transforming", but do not propose any radical changes. Is it radical to suggest tourism should provide decent jobs as proposed by Sustainable Development Goal 8 (United Nations, n.d.)? Academics have the luxury to deliberate upon how tourism should be, what principles it should follow, and then understand what forces prevent that vision from becoming reality. More future scenario studies are necessary to understand how tourism system can be reconfigured to be ethical. For example, could all accommodation businesses be worker-owned as co-operatives (e.g. Higgins-

Desbiolles, 2012)? How would that alter the fairness of tourism system? If the neoliberal capitalist system makes tourism unethical, alternative models based on other values rather than profit-making can be examined. For example, anarchist tourism would be based on principles of autonomy and solidarity, and can take various forms including some of the more radical manifestations of social tourism, community-based tourism and deep ecotourism (Tolkach, 2017).

The ethics of tourism cannot escape the politics of tourism, yet more tourism studies adopting ethical and political theories are required to envisage the whole spectrum of potential future developments for tourism under a variety of political philosophical perspectives. Webster & Ivanov (2016) is one of the rare occurrences where such political range is discussed. An exemplary discussion on intersection between ethical, political and development considerations is Bianchi & Stephenson's (2014) work on citizenship. Further research is needed to understand how individuals' political values, local, regional and national politics, as well as geopolitics affect the tourism system. Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie (2019) approach could be used to understanding future of tourism through its past and examining how various factors might shape the ethics and politics of the future via scenario planning. Such research is especially important in the current politically volatile world that nevertheless needs to cooperate to overcome global challenges. What should tourism look like to help achieve United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and ensure a just and sustainable world by 2050?

Figure 1 summarises the future research themes emerging from this paper. Different units of study are nested within the figure to demonstrate the scale that needs to be addressed from an individual, to an organisation, to a place, to a wider social phenomenon. The different scales are separated by dash lines to signify the interactions occurring between different individuals and organisations which all need to be considered. These interactions occur within broader societies and nature. As a result, different theories and concepts from psychology, sociology and other disciplines need to be adopted to better understand ethical processes involved in tourism and further advance ethical tourism.

Figure 1. Future research on ethics of tourism

The Tourist

Averting clashes of civilisations

Ethical decision-making process

Ethical tourist behaviour across contexts

Tourism Business

Motivation to be ethical

Ethical business models & corporate activism

Future of unethical products

Tourism Destination

Stakeholder and power relations

Formation and evolution of destination values

Just principles of managing visitation

Tourism System

Political philosophies and tourism

Scenario planning for ethical tourism

Ethical inertia and other barriers to ethical tourism transformation

Nature

Societies and cultures

Source: figure by authors

Conclusions

This paper has reviewed the evolution of academic and industry discussions surrounding ethics of tourism. It did not intend to cover all tourism ethics literature and ongoing debates, but rather highlight the progress in the field. Ethics of tourism are very complex due to its mostly hedonic and cross-cultural nature. Yet engagement with ethical theories in tourism research has been rather scarce until recently. Thus, stronger engagement with ethics as a branch of philosophy is necessary. Tourism studies have a great potential to enrich research into ethics. It presents a great opportunity to understand the nature of morality and the ethical decision-making process. By definition, a tourist is a person that is taken out of their usual environment and is transported to an unfamiliar setting. How such change of context change's one's ethics and consideration of acceptable actions remains unclear. Tourism provides immense opportunities to examine the relativist nature of ethics, the influence of social norms and the importance of social constraints.

There is a lot of scope to engage with ethical theories to advance tourism studies. This paper has structured such research opportunities according to the scale from an individual tourist behaviour, to tourism businesses, destinations and the tourism system. At an individual scale the focus should be placed on understanding the ethical decision-making process in various contexts. At business scale the focus of research needs to be on investigating business models, principles and outcomes that can be deemed ethical, and how to support tourism businesses to become ethical. Destination scale turns towards issues of community, regional and national development with a strong focus on stakeholder and power relations. The tourism system scale asks how tourism can be truly re-imagined to be ethical. This agenda involves ethical as well as political philosophy considerations and approaches.

Tourism studies often imply ethical considerations, especially, while discussing sustainability. Such research however is often focused on the present or very near future and is constrained by factors currently limiting ethics of tourism. It would be of great benefit to expand the horizon towards 2050 and explore much more creatively what the right way is to do tourism.

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