

Konstantinos Andriotis
 Middlesex University Business School
 UDC: 338.48

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND THE DEGROWTH PARADIGM

Abstract: *This paper aims to look at alternatives to the classic models of development by exploring the paradigm of degrowth in a tourism context. Degrowth touted as an alternative to mainstream paradigms of development, aims to ensure a high quality of life for people in a society where work, production and consumption are reduced. As a weapon to the problems accrued by capitalism, degrowth reorients the current unsustainable and inequitable path through the transition to a smaller economy with less production and consumption. By arguing that natural limits to growth of many destinations have already been surpassed and their carrying capacity levels have been reached, degrowth proposes the abandonment of growth which promotes nothing*

other than a quest for profits on part of the owners of capital and results in disastrous implications for the environment and the humanity. As a philosophical concept and movement, degrowth is revolutionary and anticapitalist directed to sustainable change which results from an interest in locality and place, small and medium-sized enterprises, employment generation and reduction in working hours, ecology and quality of life, decommodification of tourism activity, carbon reduction in transport, changed pattern of production and consumption, and high priority in the travel experience.

Key words: *development, degrowth paradigm, antimaterialism.*

Introduction

In the past, a growing number of developmentalists (e.g. Barnett, 1988; Harrison, 1988; Loeb and Paredes, 1991; Rostow 1960; Wall, 1997) argued that in order for a country or a region to be developed, it has to effectively replicate the patterns of those types of economic and political systems which had already industrialized during the 18th and 19th centuries. Hence, they believed that the only way to achieve development is through the elimination of the ‘under-development’ characteristics and the acquisition of Western ones (Andriotis, 2003). For them, this form of “Westernisation” required the movement from the ‘traditional’ sector,

comprising by an indigenous culture and a sub-culture of peasantry and social norms oriented towards maintaining the status quo (Brown, 1981; Potter et al, 1999), into a modern sector incorporating the influence of foreign, primarily developed world, economic practices and social norms (Brown, 1981; Clancy, 1999; Potter et al, 1999).

These early approaches to development are not free of their own prejudices. In reality, growth which encompasses socio-economic and cultural changes has been criticized for an exclusively “goods-centered” view of development rather than a “people-centered” development ethic (Ingham, 1993, p.1803). Thus, in the absence of institutional measures of redistribution of wealth, these tradi-



tional approaches seem to lead to inequalities and to an increasing gap between rich and poor (Muraca, 2012, p. 540). Therefore, “westernization” and “industrialization” as strategies to enhance well-being have been challenged from different perspectives, to the extent that Adelman and Morris (1967) in their historical studies on the pattern of growth for a number of countries, including developed as well as developing ones, concluded that there is no universally recommended path to economic growth.

The idea that dominates the western countries is to produce too much so that citizens can buy too much (Latouche, 2009). However, there are physical limits to economic growth leading to the inference that the growth society is not only unsustainable but also undesirable (Andriotis, 2002). Based on this, Victor (2012) suggests that in order to meet the structures of the ecological and social limits to growth there should be a shift to low growth, no growth or degrowth. In practice, while economists supported that development is growth-oriented and arises only under the very condition of capitalism, through the exploitation of human and natural resources, social scientists disassociated development from industrialization and proposed as alternative the use of indigenous models of development. As a consequence, in the 1980s the focus switched to new theories which provide new insights and promoted democracy by enfranchising the economically weak (Ingham, 1993). These approaches use present-day interpretations of the old wisdoms and newer concerns without taking for granted the historical experience of rich countries (Ingham, 1993, p. 1803), argue that growth from development should be decoupled from modernization, and call for a higher attention to indigenous development and issues such as decentralization, justice, sustainability and rural development.

Nowadays, the tourism sector fulfills a key role in economic growth for many

countries. Despite the pervasive tourism growth after the Second World War and the use of tourism by many countries as a development strategy to improve community welfare through income and employment generation, and to help destinations to move from a position of ‘poverty’ or ‘under-development’ to a position of ‘wealth’ or ‘more development’, development literature has almost neglected tourism as a development approach (Andriotis, 2003b; Apostolopoulos, 1994; Gunn, 1994; Sinclair, 1998). In fact, over a period of years only a few authors have used empirical methods to shed light on the meaning of tourism development and the ways which this meaning will provide lessons for future tourism development. According to these scholars, e.g. Harrison (1992) and Woodcock and France (1994), traditional development approaches could prove a useful framework for the explanation of tourism development patterns and processes. Although various approaches to development have been adopted in the case of tourism, e.g. *laissez-faire* (simply doing nothing); diffusionism, dependency and modernisation, none of these approaches has ever attained absolute dominance. Bearing this in mind, the controversial opinions of development and the failure to consider the needs of the local community and the importance of environmental and cultural conservation in development (Andriotis, 2000), more contemporary concepts/frameworks originated, such as sustainable development, ecotourism, green tourism, community-based tourism, pro-poor or fair trade tourism, slow tourism and degrowth. All these frameworks adopted different perspectives in their aim to direct changes from development towards a more idealized way.

It is the aim of this paper to look the most recent alternatives to the classic models of development by exploring the paradigm of degrowth in a tourism context. Degrowth touted as an alternative approach to mainstream paradigms of development, aims to ensure

a high quality of life for people in a society where work, production and consumption are reduced. As a weapon to the problems accrued by capitalism, degrowth reorients the current unsustainable and inequitable path through the transition to a smaller economy with less production and consumption (Nørgård, 2013; van Griethuysen, 2010). By arguing that natural limits to growth of many destinations have already been surpassed and their carrying capacity levels have been reached, degrowth proposes the abandonment of growth which promotes nothing other than a quest for profits on part of the owners of capital and results in disastrous implications for the environment and the humanity (Latouche, 2009, p.8).

Searching the roots of degrowth

While the reasons for travel and modes of traveling underwent broad changes, which can be linked to the different cultural environment of tourists through the centuries, there are many travelers who still look for primitive forms of traveling and the use of moderate means of transport and facilities. Like early travelers who used a variety of travel modes including: biking, hiking, boating, hitchhiking, riding freights, etc., and a primitive range of lodgings: sleeping in fields, campgrounds, local houses, inns etc., nowadays there are tourists, such as 'hippies' (Wilson, 1997); 'drifters' (Cohen, 1973), or in the words of MacCannell (1992) 'neo-nomads'; 'wanderers' (Vogt, 1976); frontier travelers (Laing, 2006; Laing and Crouch 2009a; 2009b; 2011); lifestyle travelers (Cohen, 2010); and antinomians (Andriotis, 2013), who try to avoid the established touristic circuits, and visit pristine environments, which function as spaces open to conditions of freedom.

While in the past scholars believed that many destinations faced the problem of un-

derdevelopment, after the turn to the 21st century the voices, which supported that development is not always necessary and that many destinations are overdeveloped to the extent that there is a need to downscale their tourism activity (e.g. Andriotis, 2009; 2013), increased. Moreover, while in the era of globalization tourism was supposed to offer great opportunities to poor communities as free-market forces worked their magic, it has been proven that in most of them the rich have got richer and the poor have got relatively poorer (Munck and O'Hearn, 1999, p. xi). As a reaction to the problems accrued by capitalism, new development approaches have evolved which tout as alternative to the mainstream, and aim to reorient the current unsustainable and inequitable path through the transition to a smaller economy with less production and consumption (Nørgård, 2013; van Griethuysen, 2010). These approaches suggest the idea of limited growth advocated by degrowth as a part of philosophical debates for centuries.

In fact, sources of degrowth can be traced back to ancient Greece. Just to offer one example, the Greek philosopher Diogenes, can be considered as one of the early degrowth supporters. Known as Diogenes the Cynic, Diogenes lived in a barrel and discarded all his possessions except a cloak, a purse and a wooden bowl, and maintained that civilization is regressive and all artificial creatures of society are incompatible with happiness. Diogenes' philosophy and way of life implied a return to the simplicity of nature, which has been adopted as a way of life by many advocates of degrowth through the centuries.

In our modern world, the notion of degrowth came in the surface during the 70s when various authors, such as Gorz (1977); and the father of degrowth Georgescu-Roegen (1979), used the word "Dicroissance" (french for degrowth), a term that during this era was not popular neither for scholars nor for activists. It was only after the turn of



the 21st century, from 2001 in France, 2004 in Italy and 2006 in Catalonia (Spain), when degrowth became an activist slogan. More recently, in 2008, the term 'degrowth' was accepted in the English language, at the first degrowth conference in Paris, which marked the initiation of degrowth in the debate of academic research (Demaria et al., 2011:2).

The concept of degrowth has been introduced only recently in the tourism studies. Nevertheless, while degrowth is seen as a relatively new discourse, its agenda has existed for decades. Tourists' degrowth attitude has strong ideological and philosophical roots to hippies who during the 60s and 70s in protest against industrial society used to sleep in the caves of Matala, Crete (Andriotis, 2006). Nowadays, one of the most representative forms of non-conventional behavior of hippies is expressed by antinomians, a normative group of people who synthesizes an identity of Indian tribalism and fosters an 'alternative mode of existence', by visiting Gavdos (a Greek island on the margin of European civilization) (Andriotis, 2013).

Elements of degrowth

The main idea of degrowth is resistance to the homogenizing effects of economic and cultural globalization, which generates places where more or less seem to look alike (Mayer and Knox, 2006). It has attracted attention from many disciplines concerned with aspects of limits to growth and various authors in explaining its meaning have used a number of adjectives such as happy degrowth (Bilancini and D'Alessandro, 2011; Nørgård, 2013); sustainable degrowth (Amate and de Molina, 2013; Martinez-Aliere et al., 2011; Schneider, Kallis and Martinez-Alier, 2010) and fair degrowth (Muraca, 2012).

While the degrowth agenda has existed for centuries and has attracted a great deal of research attention from various disciplines

(see for example Alexander, 2012; Andriotis, 2013; Kallis, 2011; Kallis and Schneider, 2008; Latouche, 2010; Levallois, 2010; O'Neill, 2012; Schneider, Kallis and Martinez-Alier, 2010; Sekulova et al., 2013; Trainer, 2012; van Griethuysen, 2012; van den Berg, J., 2011; Xue, Arler and Naess, 2012), it has rarely been examined from the perspective of tourism studies. As a consequence, it is seen as a relatively new discourse, which requires further research attention and exploration.

Even the few published studies in the tourism literature (see Bourdeau and Berthelot, undated; Canavan, 2013; Hall, 2009) have been characterized by a descriptive rather than an analytical approach and, hence, the subject has not been explicitly examined from the distinct perspective of tourism. (Exception includes the empirical study of Andriotis, 2013). Bearing in mind past research negligence, it is the overall purpose of this paper to look at alternatives to the classic models of development by exploring and applying the concept of degrowth in a tourism context. Being among the limited attempts to scientifically approach the concept from the perspective of tourism, this study explores important core themes of degrowth in the context of tourism.

Reduction in Working Hours

Degrowth requires getting away from the work-based model and work-based society through a sharp reduction in the number of working hours, and ensuring that everyone has a satisfying job (Bourdeau and Berthelot, undated; Latouche 2009, p. 77). By reducing working hours, citizens have more unconstrained time to travel. Thus, degrowth tourists travel more and tend to stay longer periods of the destination they visit.

Environmental friendly transportation

Working fewer hours will facilitate more sustainable, time-consuming, lifestyle practices (Dickinson and Peeters, 2012). As a result, there will be a move away from air travel and instead use of bicycles, trains and other low impact modes of transport, together with hiking and walking, all of them characterized by slower methods of travel and low-carbon consumption. In addition, tourists will be encouraged to choose destinations nearer to home in order to travel shorter distances and stay longer. As a result, the number of domestic tourists will be increased. As Latouche (2009) put it:

Travelitis, or our obsession with travelling further and further, faster and faster, and more and more often (and always for less) is a largely artificial need that has been created by super-modern life, exacerbated by the media and stimulated by travel agencies and tour operators, and it must be revised downwards (p.39).

Antimaterialism

Increased production releases into the environment large emissions of waste and pollutants that they have overwhelmed the planet's natural absorption capacity. By consuming fewer goods and services that are truly useful will result in a less contaminated environment and fewer threatened species (Victor 2008: 220). Thus, according to degrowth philosophy a turn towards strong sustainable consumption is required (Lorek and Fuchs 2013: 41). From a tourism perspective, degrowth requires rejection of western travel amenities and commoditised tourism products that result in negative environmental impact and increased waste of resources.

Lack of industrialization

Degrowth vacations should be less and less organized and industrialized. By traveling more unhurriedly the degrowth traveler gets the opportunity to appreciate a destination in a deeper and more meaningful way. As a result of their alternative lifestyle, degrowth tourists' activities are not commodified and allow greater emphasis on the travel experience. The downscaling of tourism infrastructure, suggested by degrowth will offer a richness of experience through the focus on locality and engagement with the local communities.

Increased benefits for the local population

Degrowth development requires labour intensive projects which are likely to be of a small scale rather than the mass production methods of modern capital-intensive industry (Hirschman and Twum-Baah, 1978, p. 84). As a consequence, degrowth tourism generates net benefits for the local population as well as community participation which in turn will increase control over resources for groups excluded from decision-making processes.

Conclusion

Degrowth can be considered as one of the most recent approaches to development, or to be more specific, to limited growth. For the reason that degrowth can be considered not only as the most contemporary, but also the most controversial approach, its principal features make it to be highly differentiated from all other forms of tourism development. In more detail, it is evident that some of the elements of degrowth tourism feature in some ways with other forms of alternative tourism such as ecotourism, sustainable tourism, green tourism, slow



tourism, community-based tourism, pro-poor tourism and fair-trade tourism. For instance, while ecotourism which focuses on preserving the environmental base on which tourism depends, pro-poor or fair trade tourism which attempts to increase the local benefits on the livelihoods of the poor, community-based tourism which aims to increase local involvement in tourism and slow tourism which requires the use of low impact forms of transport and the choice of destinations nearer to home, present several similarities with degrowth tourism, they do not adopt the philosophical concepts of degrowth which deal with limits to growth, alternative lifestyles, anti-materialism and volunteer simplicity. As a result, while we can conclude that there is a notable convergence of degrowth tourism with other types of alternative tourism, degrowth tourism cannot be equated to other alternative forms of tourism. The reason for this is that degrowth as a term brings together all positive preconditions of other forms of low impact/alternative tourism that individual types of tourism do not.

To conclude, the degrowth movement is revolutionary and anticapitalist. Its guiding philosophy is directed to sustainable change which results from an interest in locality and place, small and medium-sized enterprises, employment generation and reduction in working hours, ecology and quality of life, decommodification of tourism activity, carbon reduction in transport, changed pattern of production and consumption, and high priority in the travel experience. All these can contribute to a “smooth transition” to a tourism society of degrowth. Paraphrasing **Mayer and Knox (2006) who refereed** to slow tourism in an urban context we can say that degrowth represents a viable model for alternative development “sensitive and responsive to the complicated interdependencies between the goals for economic development, environmental protection, and social equity (p.321).”

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