

6. Imagined sustainability? Going beyond the image

Chairs: Can-Seng Ooi & Liu Jun:

Being sustainable is central in tourism today. What sustainability means and how it is executed in practice are ambiguous and vague (Budeanu, Miller, Moscardo, & Ooi, 2016; Hardy, Beeton, & Pechlaner, 2002). Almost every destination, attraction, airline and tourism business boast of their sustainability credential but many tourism activities remain environmentally dubious and carry exploitative social consequences. There are at least three inherent challenges to realising sustainable and “good and just tourism” (Jamal, 2019).

One, in the context of modern consumerism, all packaged sustainability practices are selective and limited. A holistic and comprehensive approach to sustainable living is not viable to most people. Hotels have introduced token greener practices, such as not changing bed linens and towels everyday; is that sufficient? It is debatable if sustainable schemes are mere marketing tricks or do they really make a difference. The efficacy of sustainability practices and schemes must be presented, explained and defended.

Two, the impact of sustainable practices is often long term, and the effects are not necessarily visible immediately, e.g. maintaining biodiversity, increasing social equity and using only renewable sources of energy. There are many accreditation schemes. These schemes must be interrogated on how they frame and measure sustainability. There are reasons to be sceptical of how they may be gamed or creatively interpreted.

Three, modern tourism is arguably inherently unsustainable. Tourism activities are primarily commercial and contribute to economic development. There are however social, cultural and environment impact. Many tourism activities are conducted for leisure purposes, and can be viewed as luxurious and wasteful. Consequently, tourism activities can be criticised for being unnecessary.

This panel encourages researchers to examine how tourism businesses and destinations selectively present their environmental and social sustainability image, and interrogate the politics of sustainability in the industry.

References

- Budeanu, A., Miller, G., Moscardo, G., & Ooi, C.-S. (2016). Sustainable tourism, progress, challenges and opportunities: an introduction. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 111, 285–294. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2015.10.027>
- Hardy, A., Beeton, R. J. S., & Pechlaner, H. (2002). Sustainable tourism: An overview of the concept and its position in relation to conceptualizations of tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*.
- Jamal, T. (2019). *Justice and Ethics in Tourism*. London: Routledge.

