

drivers of environmental degradation was expressed in Principle 8 of the Rio Declaration: “To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should **reduce and eliminate** unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies” (emphasis added).

Fast-forward to 2015 when the SDGs were forged, and that commitment has been reduced to mere remnants in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Although watered down, Agenda 21 itself is closer to reality than is the 2030 Agenda as it recognizes the links to imbalances in patterns of production

Tinkering with “sustainable or eco tourism” hides the real face of tourism

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Despite pronouncements of tourism being a positive force for economic development and poverty eradication, tourism is inept at meeting the challenge of implementing the SDGs. Like no other industry, tourism promotes – and glamorizes – a hyper-mobile and hyper-consumeristic lifestyle, rendering sustainability elusive. In fact, tourism development is fraught with negatives including inequality, social and cultural erosion, environmental degradation and climate pollution.

Recent research is particularly alarming in terms of tourism’s contribution to climate change, primarily due to the high energy use for transport such as air travel. Based on a new global tourism emissions model, global tourism is set to emit some 300 gigatonnes of CO₂ between 2015 and 2100, which is 30 percent of the global carbon budget for sustainable development. It is preposterous to take so much of this budget, also needed to meet the energy demand of billions of people around

the world. Tourism alternatives such as “green” or “eco”-tourism can also be problematic. Not only do they usually depend on long-haul flights – but despite some exceptions, they also tend to penetrate fragile ecosystems and Indigenous Peoples’ community land, and trigger biodiversity and culture loss.

Tourism as a major source of financial leakage is well documented. As it is frequently large foreign companies that either initiate or take over commercially successful tourism projects and repatriate profits to headquarters and shareholders based abroad, the domestic retention of tourism benefits and their distributive effects has a very poor record. A particular characteristic of contemporary tourism in this age of neoliberal globalization is that it is closely intertwined with the finance and real estate industry. Ground evidence shows that vast tracts of public land are being privatized and acquired by foreign investors for luxury

tourism, residential and commercial development, resulting in displacement and disempowerment of local people. Additionally, the radically de-regulated business environment spawns price hikes and speculation, posing high risks to local economies.

Therefore, steering tourism policy and practice towards more sustainability requires first and foremost tackling the unjust economic structures and power relations that drive tourism development. We would also need to put in place regulations that effectively protect local citizens and communities from harmful tourism as well as mechanisms that require travel and tourism businesses to compensate for losses and to clean up the damage they created. Clear, transparent, accessible mechanisms of accountability are also needed to empower people(s) to monitor and hold governments, financial institutions, development agencies and the private sector engaging in tourism accountable for their actions.