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Earthly tourism and travel's contribution to a planetary *genre de vie*

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Abstract

In this reflective commentary celebrating 20 years of *Tourist Studies* I draw on my forthcoming book, *Developing Earthly Attachments in the Anthropocene*, explicitly relating its message to a future looking tourist studies agenda. I outline how such an agenda can underpin the development of ‘earthly tourism’ and thereby explore practices of travel and mobilities informing a planetary mode of living, or what the French Annales school of geography would call *genre de vie*. The article will detail the meaning of these terms and how these can be informed by, and in turn, inform a future looking academic tourist studies agenda.

Keywords

anthropocene, capitalism, earth, *genre de vie*, tourism

Introduction

In this reflective commentary celebrating 20 years of *Tourist Studies* I draw on my forthcoming book, *Developing Earthly Attachments in the Anthropocene*, explicitly relating its message to a future looking tourist studies agenda (Huijbens, forthcoming). I outline how such an agenda can underpin the development of ‘earthly tourism’ and thereby explore practices of travel and mobilities informing a planetary mode of living, or what the French Annales school of geography would call *genre de vie*. In the pages to come I flesh out the meaning of these terms and how these can be informed by, and in turn, inform a future looking academic tourist studies agenda.

The first issue of *Tourist Studies* contained an editorial by my then PhD supervisor Mike Crang, along with Adrian Franklin (Franklin and Crang, 2001). As I refocused my

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own research agenda from the uses of urban public spaces to that of tourism through developing the Icelandic Tourism Research Centre (2006–2015), I relied on that writing in advocating where the focus of critical social sciences should be directed when it comes to tourism. I frequently quoted Franklin and Crang (2001) saying:

tourist studies has been dominated by policy led and industry sponsored work so the analysis tends to internalize industry led priorities and perspectives (p. 5)

What was to emerge in my own critical tourism research agenda was developed with my colleague Martin Gren, whereby we propose a tourist studies internalising ‘Earth led priorities and perspectives’ (Gren and Huijbens, 2012, 2014, 2016). The main impetus for this proposal are the changes we are making to our planet, especially the climate, changes which are characterised for good reasons as an emergency, yet we seem largely indifferent to this (see Hoggett, 2019). What is clear to us is that with the looming catastrophe of climate emergency the Earth has trans-mutated from being perceived as a background surface for human actions and inscriptions to being a dynamically foregrounded matter of concern, arising both from the effects of the geoforce of humanity itself and our science-mediated attempts to map and exploit earthly functions. This foregrounding is arguably a facet of the burgeoning literature across the sciences on the so-called Anthropocene. At the most general level the Earth has therein become revitalised as a source for political, social and cultural theory-making in our times of climate emergency. As such, we need to adopt a progressive earthly outlook that can foster a regenerative culture in times of crisis to re-envision our ways of being and doing, co-extensive with our Earth (Huijbens, forthcoming).

When it comes to tourism, this type of re-envisioning needs to recognise how the implied agential qualities of planet Earth emerge most sharply in the industry’s reliance on the carbon economy. Highlighting this reliance in turn extends tourism’s associations with modern-day globalised capitalism and its focus on consumption to that of global environmental change. The implication is that we need ‘to think in terms of both the history of capitalism and its inequalities, and to place humans on the much larger canvas of geological and evolutionary times at the same time’ (Latour and Leclercq, 2016: 197). The question then arises as to how tourism can jolt us out of our indifference to the climate and our set ways of consumption towards an Earth-oriented progressive outlook to augment our own and planetary wellbeing.

My contribution in this commentary is therefore on the ways in which tourist studies can inform a type of tourism which nurtures a sense of ourselves as one with this planet, embracing the entanglements we have with places near and far we hold dear. This ‘mode of life’ is thereby one that is global yet local, and makes an explicit reference to *genre de vie* and *fin de siècle* 19th-century Vidalian human geography. In its original guise, the *genre de vie* was about in-depth place-specific and regional descriptions of the relations between life and land. This suggests a certain fixity of ‘the local’ that seemed to emerge and which early 20th-century geographers would meticulously document in ways like a ‘botanist working on plants or an entomologist on insects’ (Deprest, 2011: 159):

It was this fixity [through force of habit and rootedness] which allowed geographers to study the geographical distribution of *genres de vie*, to cluster, classify and distinguish between them in the manner of the natural sciences. (Deprest, 2011: 161; see also Sorre, 1962)

The traditional descriptions associated with *genre de vie* and that of the Annales school often fetishised the local and even more sinisterly fed notions of environmental determinisms, violent nationalism and racism which persist to date. Avoiding ways that 'leave ourselves open to the seduction of proximity, nostalgia, or protectionism, engaging in a reductive strategy of triage' (Ruddick, 2017: 120), I claim it is only through the local that we can make sense of the global and, in particular, the Earth as a foregrounded matter of concern. I follow Latour (2018) in wanting to rediscover an inhabitable earthly ground but through a tourism lens, and how this unfolds through our earthly entanglements, showing how in the Anthropocene our mode of life is attached to the one, yet many, Earths. I claim tourism can be part and parcel of a planetary *genre de vie* that allows us to live equitably and communicate with the forces of the Earth.

The trouble with tourism

Reusing Franklin and Crang's (2001) foundational editorial title here, the trouble with the tourism industry is its unfettered growth. When the eminent geographer David Harvey presented his 'Urban front' advisory in Utrecht in November 2019, he built on the well-known UNWTO graph of international tourist arrivals perpetuated worldwide by tourism stakeholders. It shows the booming growth of international tourism and as such has become one of the key indicators of the post war 'Great Acceleration' in consumption with concomitant ecosystem ramifications (see Steffen et al., 2015). Harvey recounted how he had become aware of the challenges of tourism, especially that of unfettered growth whilst setting up his advisory in Barcelona. Looking closer into this matter, Harvey argued that tourism is moving centre stage in our current socio-ecological juncture through two interrelated processes. First, it became recognised that tourism is an industry of prime importance when it contributed to averting the worst of the 2008 financial crisis, through its exponential growth, particularly in the burgeoning East Asian market that is currently the economic motor of the world. Concomitantly, it is the nature of tourism that is moving centre stage as the engine of our economy, which Harvey described in his lecture as planned obsolescence gone instantaneous. Tourism as the 'experience economy' is to him the latest of capital accumulation frontiers that have important ramifications for our cities and societies. The movement of tourism to the centre stage of our economy is strongly aligned with a type of 'bucket list' mobility, whereby the imperative is to consume as many experiences as can be lined up, and at an ever accelerated rate. Once consumed that particular tourism experience becomes obsolete and a new experience needs to be developed, marketed and ultimately sought by the tourist who seeks new and constant sources of gratification.

Despite lofty rhetoric and aspirations that link tourism with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Bianchi and de Man (2020) argue that within the current capitalistic neoliberal 'growth' economy, tourism fails to address the actual links between tourism and poverty, environmental degradation, exploitation of resources and inequalities. All in all, tourism, as currently promoted and practiced, is one of our clearest indications of our consumptive aspirations and a capitalism 'too big to fail, yet to monstrous to persist' as Harvey insisted, not least from a climate perspective which Gössling and Peeters (2015) make clear. Moreover, capitalism's inequalities persist through our current

mobilities. Travel and tourism practices are dominated by the very same parts of humanity that have hitherto contributed by far the most to our current climate predicament. In a global context tourism's current growth-paradigmatic race to the bottom is fuelled by how we compare ourselves to others (Lyubomirski, 2008). Worldwide, people of growing affluence in emerging economies aspire to the globe-trotting as practiced by the affluent in the West. However, from the perspective of the climate and with the identified issues of 'overtourism', the future of tourism cannot be about bringing the prospects or benefits of jet-propelled globe-trotting to all the inhabitants of the planet. Therefore, we need to establish other standards and find other elements of travel that are gratifying but remain aligned with aspirations of Earth-led priorities and perspectives.

Seeing capitalism as 'too big to fail, yet too monstrous to persist', I envision moves towards the displacement of capitalism. What is needed is a post-capitalist communal world in which the repertoire of agency is wider, a world that allows for multiplicity and cultural diversity. Thereby I see a need to cultivate a new vision of mobility, which will nurture local attachments, necessitate slowing down and encourage an appreciation of what is close at hand. This is an Earth-centred narrative for tourism. One that is focused on telling stories about how we can take to heart anything from stones, mud, molecules, trees, fish, sheep, bicycles, peat, windmills to the Earth itself, and let these guide our moral compass and everyday decision-making. In essence, this is a re-storying of our relations with planet Earth (see e.g. Chalquist, 2020), calling for attentiveness to things we take for granted or even ignore:

Transforming noticing into attentiveness – into the cultivation of skills for both paying attention to others and meaningfully responding – (. . .) Beyond viewing other creatures as mere symbols, resources, or background for the lives of humans (Van Dooren et al., 2016: 6).

In Bregman's (2020) call for a new realism he follows Jean-Jacques Rousseau in claiming that at heart we are all good and implores us to come out of the closet and not shy away from our innate kindness (p. 394), reminding us that the more we give the more you have (p. 378). What I am advocating is a tourist studies agenda around humbleness and care that we need to exercise in our dealings with the Earth, put simply; being kind and giving back to the Earth.

These approaches point to a tourist studies focused on our earthly attachments in recognition of our ever, ongoing earthly entanglements. A tourist studies adopting an affirmative pragmatic stance to the on-goingness of life and inherent open-endedness in and of the Earth. The recognition of the earthly entanglements constitutive of our planetary mode of life is about extending our temporary registers beyond that of the immediate present, even to that of geological time (Yusoff, 2013: 781). In effect it is a plea for timefulness:

We are thus both intemperate and intemperate — time illiterate. Like inexperienced but overconfident drivers, we accelerate into landscapes and ecosystems with no sense of their long-established traffic patterns, and then react with surprise and indignation when we face the penalties for ignoring natural laws (Bjornerud, 2018: 7).

Realising how we are part of an intricate web of life, alive with what has been hitherto deemed dead or inanimate calls for a degree of respect, reverence and responsibility (a triple R). These are key words to guide our tourist studies agenda in times of climate emergency and crisis. From there we can start to see how our being is porous and relational in nature, requiring that we work *with* rather than on or for Earth and all that it is composed of. The life of the triple R is thus one of intelligent conviviality with sentient, multiple Earth(s).

Establishing and maintaining networks of care comes down to the stories we choose to tell and how we choose to make meaning matter. Stories can only be examples, particular slices through time and space that illustrate how we can enact networks of care for the Earth. These I provided in the afterword to the book *Anthropocene Ecologies: Entanglements of Tourism, Nature and Imagination* whereby I explored ‘Involving Earth – Tourism Matters of Concern’ (Huijbens, 2019). Therein I argued that whilst some are reconsidering their modes of transport, their consumption patterns and choices of activities with concern for how these might impact our common climate and local environment, others have balked at this realisation that our lives are fundamentally attached to the Earth. As some of us are somewhat swept off our feet by the climate crisis, some plant their feet more firmly, whilst others are content to go along. However, we need to highlight the stories of the latter and give examples that narrate the concerns of those who opt for understanding, who perceive and experience the impacts on places near at hand and far away, in ways that move beyond a consumptive spectacle. Showing how our surroundings can be experienced differently through stories is a recognition of our moral responsibility to each other and the Earth;

that it is ultimately humans who will have to accept and exercise their unique and unequal agency in deciding how to treat nonhumans who cannot actually participate in democratic deliberations as equivalent subjects (Büscher and Fletcher, 2020: 195).

We are the ones who need to animate our kindness (Bregman, 2020) and have it inform our practices of ‘conviviality’ (Büscher and Fletcher, 2020) which are of earthly stretch and duration. In the next section I speculate on what such conviviality may look like.

Earthly tourism

Our current climatic juncture is a time of great uncertainty, where the future of life as we know it, if not human civilisation, hangs in the balance. All ideas are needed, all thoughts should be welcomed and we need to develop a whole new vocabulary to come to terms with our state of affairs. At this time, we are fumbling around in the dark, aware of a need for a more holistic set of relations, a way to re-stabilise our earthly attachments. The time to experiment, re-orient and reinvent what it means to be human on and of this Earth, is now. Kimmerer (2013) in her fascinating book about Sweetgrass (*Hierochloe odorata*), explores how we can give back to the Earth and stay true to our joint ongoingness through the depths of time:

To be a hill, to be a sandy beach, to be a Saturday, all are possible verbs in a world where everything is alive. . . . English does not give us many tools for incorporating respect for animacy. In English, you are either a human or a thing. (Kimmerer, 2013: 55–56)

Much like Bjornerud (2018) who wants to see rocks as verbs, we need to recognise ‘things’ through their ‘thinging’. To do so, we can harken to the only quality that really seems to separate us from the rest of the animal kingdom and that is our capacity to tell stories, and convince others with our storytelling. The materiality of a place, the stone, the feather, the fish and the mountain, they all become animated through the narrator. Stories matter and our mimetic desires and eagerness to belong animate our being. For Irigaray (2019) desire is the point of transition that gives birth to our spiritual transcendence, whilst staying faithful to our subjection to the Earth. She uses the metaphor of fire, and says making it captures our real living potential, and indeed sharing stories around whichever fires we jointly make tells us who we are. The language of science and technology tends to obfuscate these stories and shroud the world’s liveliness in darkness through the violence of abstraction and compartmentalisation of the challenges to be addressed. What we need at our current climatic juncture is to explore from within, our embodied here and now (Noonan, 2018). We need to explore what those changed practices are of being and doing that enable us to form earthly attachments and allow us to actualise an earthly mindset. Thereby our decisions become place-bound, taking into account all there is: material, animal and human and weighing these equally in the decision-making process.

The system of knowledge creation and dissemination in my discipline of geography is the map. Indeed ‘[t]he most precise expression of geographic knowledge is found in the map, an immemorial symbol’ (Sauer, 1965 [1925]: 317). The map has always been used for wayfinding, figuring out where to go. Yet, in opposition to filling in the blank spaces for the benefit of appropriation and conquest, when lost in times of climatic uncertainty, an omnipresent Earth and egalitarian mutualism of all life forms, this is a map that needs to become inclusive of all the ways in which matter moves. Of us imbricated with the whole fragile veneer we call our home on the crust of planet Earth. The crucial question is how we can go about the valuing the more-than-human, which sits beyond the register of the science and technology mediated mapping exercises we have become accustomed to? For that we need ‘to transgress the boundaries that tend to keep science, environmentalism, and radical politics separate’ (Dawson, 2016: 15, quoted in van Dooren, 2018: 172). The emerging map is thus extensively inclusive, but remains ultimately one of our own making.

A tourist studies agenda can provide a roadmap for place-bound decisions of destination development and tourism mobilities. These would need to be inclusive maps to destinations complete with a range of relations and consequences in a creative way, generative of participation and empowerment by a truly wide range of stakeholders. For instance what would an African savannah safari look like if the interests of the animals encounters, the soils traversed, river engaged with, wetlands, streams and hydrological cycles tapped would be recounted through the ways in which these are mediated by ecology and human imagination, scientific models, and technological intervention. This would be a map showing how the networks of humans, technologies and nature are off

and for the planet we live with. This is a map constituted by relations and matters of concern extending all across the globe and including more than humans (For inspirations see e.g.: Latour and Weibel, 2020).

This is a road map for destination development and tourism wayfinding inclusive of what Nigel Clark and Kathryn Yusoff call ‘geosocial formations’, whereby:

human agency [is] to be thoroughly contextualized within the socio-structural dynamics, geographical disjunctures and historical trajectories that have shaped our species life. (. . .) In brief, thinking the becomings of earth and society together might help us probe the richly layered formations we have inherited for the overlooked, marginalized or as yet unactualized geosocial possibilities murmuring within them (Clark and Yusoff, 2017: 5–6).

We can even go so far as to adopt the perspective of the elemental particles and generate an ‘anthropogenic table of elements’, making visible ‘the elements from the political and moral questions of the Anthropocene’ (Neale et al., 2019). Recognising this vast array of constitutive compositions, all the way to the elemental, and adding the depth of time, we gain an understanding of how an earth-oriented progressive outlook draws from a ‘whole new series of materialisms, vitalisms, realisms, and inhuman turns requir[ing] us to think about what has definite and forceful existence regardless of our sense of world’ (Colebrook, 2017: 7). An earth-oriented progressive outlook invites us to map our relations, understanding and attending to human–animal, multispecies and material encounters.

So how can this realisation guide us towards a climatically and environmentally sound future for the planet and humanity from the perspective of tourism? At this juncture I want to harken back to my own work with my colleague Martin Gren.

To facilitate the earth led priorities and perspectives, we outlined three tentative tourism destinies. The first is ‘non-carbon tourism’ – simply travelling without burning fossil fuels or using carbon, thereby countering carbon emission growths that at current out-strip decarbonisation of tourism related technology (see: Lenzen et al., 2018). Non-carbon tourism spells doom for the aviation industry as the prospects of electric or solar-powered flights for the masses is simply a myth (Peeters, 2017). Thereby with non-carbon tourism travel will inherently take more time and travelling becomes not only about the destination, but also the journey itself.

The second tourism destiny we identify relates to the fact that we do not all need to be going to different places in order to gain experiences and learn new things. ‘Stay home tourism’ is then about learning to appreciate that which is close at hand and in your local surroundings, boosting local economies and sense of community, cultivating our earthly attachments. Indeed ‘it is in mundaneness rather than spectacle we can find the most meaningful engagement with nature’ as Büscher and Fletcher (2020) emphasise but to which I would add any encounter (p. 171). Some simple questions to illustrate this might be: Do you know your neighbour? Can you name the plants in your backyard? Do you know how many animals live in and around your home? Have you seen how blue the sky is from your own roof? How warm the sun is on your porch? How nice the food tastes from your fridge? Did you know about the restaurant around the corner or the cafe up the street? These questions are really about people knowing more about their backyard and trying to experience it as we do a tourist destination.

From this appreciation of the close at hand and that which is nearby is the third tourism destiny, we label 'destination stewardship'. Becoming sensitised and attuned to the more-than-human rhythms and lifeworlds is key to this notion of stewardship. A holistic sense of oneness and being-with the place in that moment. This care for attractions and sites of interest can inform destination development plans, infrastructure design and the ways in which tourism products are composed.

These three tourism destinies all have their own sporadic manifestations in tourism at present, but have not altered the course of tourism development generally, not least under the aegis of a growth oriented economic imperative of a post 2008 reality. Still I persist with this commentary and in my research (see also Huijbens and Jóhannesson, 2019). Allowing for the time taken and the journey experienced, the foregrounding of the Earth and the chance to foster attachments and attuning to more-than-human lifeworlds, is a challenge to be presented to all those interested in tourism and its development.

A tourist studies research agenda can inventory a range of stories and ideas that can set our mind along different trajectories that can help us envision different ways of being and doing tourism; being attentive to the here and now and to think about more than our own aspirations, and instead consider the future of life with the planet. The tourist studies agenda I want to perpetuate thereby creates wayfinding maps for tourists about diversity, opportunity and potentiality, one that is nonetheless limited by our planet, Earth, and the boundaries it sets. Becoming earthly we need to be plural, open and diverse yet focused on the places and spaces that make meaning matter. Holding on to the promises of tourism invested in travel and going places, is a challenge to be addressed in this context, one that I do not have scope to explore here.

Conclusion

We cannot shy away from the fact that the planet is an interconnected whole that bears our various imprints for better or worse. There is almost not a corner on the land surface that has not been mapped, transformed and visited in one fashion or another by humanity. Thereby the scale of earthly tourism needs also to be planetary and we therefore need to cultivate a planetary *genre de vie*, one that is particular to each place yet global in outlook. From the here and now we need to recognise the one Earth that we have and the many we make at each moment in each place; not reproducing the one in multiple, but seeing one place as the many Earths that can become as well as the Earth to be. Informing the practices of tourism with scholarly insights that create inclusive destination maps would be the academic tourist studies agenda I propose.

What I hope to convey here is that there is not a one true Earth to go back to. This 'going back' simply entails a radically open notion of the future and I see as implicitly hopeful by allowing for the Earth as multiplicity to be sensed, understood and politically composed. Which earthly entanglements we chose to attend to and compose from are the challenges of our times animated by the current planetary climate emergency. Telling stories of tourism practices through their earthly entanglements is imperative, whilst realising how everything is connected to everything else.

My key principles of cultivating earthly attachments and thereby a planetary mode of living are being kind and caring. These are useless to those who blindly believe in

progress and growth, but really revolve around countering that blindness with practices of using less and caring more, even loving the Earth (Irigaray, 2019). Therefore, I remain meliorist and hopeful, but in a grounded and practical sense. I claim that at our current juncture, we can afford to depart from the growth engine, and indeed, we have to! At the same time, we can open different ways into the future for the rest of the Earth's population than the path we took that will destroy what remains of the Earth's critical zone for human habitation if continued. It is imperative that we do away with growth animated tourism and get our hands dirty through the very earthly entanglements that make for us. Therein, each place matters and we cannot be alienated from it, nor render it abstract for purposes of capital gains through spectacularised consumption. The here and the now for each and everyone of us is valuable and meaningful. Folded into every here and now is the whole ecology of the place, extending into the depths of time and bringing together a wealth of trajectories we are entangled with at each and every moment. These entanglements are more than us, augment us and expand us, and we need to recognise them and their potential for our emancipation and future as we reconcile with our legacy of exploitation, alienation and abstractions of the life forces that animate us. In the Anthropocene, the Earth is one of our making, but is made anew in every moment. We have a wealth of Earths to choose from at our current climatic juncture. Recognising and developing our earthly attachments will provide tourist studies credible ways of informing tourism practices that will empower us all for an earthly future; one wherein we are kind to Earth in recognition of the fact that it matters what we do, even when we travel and enjoy leisure.

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