
STATUS QUO, THE WAY TO GO?

Tourism development discourses and the underlying ideologies that shape the social reality of the UNWTO

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Preface

Throughout my studies, the UNWTO has fascinated me as this large organization and United Nations agency that sets the tone for tourism. Lecturers would use UNWTO tourism statistics to present certain phenomena and show the magnitude of the industry and how much it has grown. The UNWTO as this grand, important organization has always represented tourism's significance in the world economy for me. With that, I became curious and started thinking, what if the UNWTO would set the course for more sustainable and regenerative tourism, and perhaps also degrowth in tourism, to ensure that tourism will become a sector that has a smaller impact on the environment and be socially more sustainable?

This thesis presents an analysis of the dominant tourism development discourses, where I analyze not only the discourses themselves, but also the ideologies that lay behind these discourses that shape the social reality of the UNWTO.

Without speaking to UNWTO officials and employees as well as external advisors for the UNWTO, this research would have not been the same. Therefore, I would like to thank Alessandra Priante, Felipe Soto, Teresa Agovino, Steve Noakes, and the fifth interviewee. Thank you for your time, openness, and insight.

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Abstract

The tourism sector has reportedly increased exponentially in the past decades and predictions were made that this growth will be ongoing in the future. With the worldwide standstill of the tourism sector due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the United Nations Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has promoted to rethink the future of tourism. As the leading organization for tourism and a United Nation specialized agency for tourism, the UNWTO exerts power to make changes in the tourism sector. The findings of this qualitative study analyzing tourism development discourses of the UNWTO from 2000-2023 have revealed the dominant discourses that entail social and environmental issues, however at the same time focusing on tourism growth. Whilst tourism scholars identify degrowth in tourism to be the only way in which tourism can be sustainable, the UNWTO promotes sustainable tourism growth and business-as-usual practices post-pandemic within the social and environmental tourism development discourses. The ideologies have been analyzed by using a typology including pure ideology, blind ideology, ideological fantasy, and cynical ideology that were derived from Žižek. Findings show, that within the UNWTO, a growth ideology prevails. Whilst the organization focuses on sustainability and climate action, tourism growth post-pandemic is aimed towards, as the dominant ideology of tourism growth determines the social reality of the UNWTO. Whilst pure and blind ideology might undermine the dominant discourse, the dominant cynical growth ideology of the UNWTO maintains the hegemony of the growth discourse within the organization and therefore also within the tourism sector.

Key words: *UNWTO; ideology; Žižek; discourse analysis; tourism development discourses*

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List of Abbreviations

10YFP STP	10-Year Framework of Sustainable Tourism Programme
GDP	Gross domestic product
MSMEs	Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
UN	United Nations
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
WTD	World Tourism Day
WTO	World Tourism Organization

Chapter 1 Introduction

“A new year brings more reason for optimism for global tourism. UNWTO anticipates a strong year for the sector even in the face of diverse challenges including the economic situation and continued geopolitical uncertainty. Economic factors may influence how people travel in 2023 and UNWTO expects demand for domestic and regional travel to remain strong and help drive the sector’s wider recovery” UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili (UNWTO, 2023, p. 1).

For several decades, tourism has been growing exponentially and has been regarded as one of the main economic sectors worldwide (Huijbens, 2021) and one of the fastest-growing industries (Fletcher, 2011). By empowering women, engaging with youth, focusing on gender equality, and including local communities in the development of tourism practices, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) states that tourism has great potential for the enhancement of livelihood all over the world. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the tourism industry was almost immediately on hold, leading to increased attention on more resilience within the sector. Now, three years later, the tourism industry is well underway to recover to pre-pandemic levels, as UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili has stated in one of the latest publications of the UNWTO (2023). Tourism is expected to bounce back 80-95% of pre-pandemic levels in 2023 (UNWTO, 2023), by recovering strongly and increasing resilience and sustainable growth.

The dimensions of the Covid-19 pandemic were disastrous to several extents; however, it has also been pointed out that crises offer a point of departure for different approaches and transformation (Georgeson, Maslin & Poessinouw, 2017; Brouder, 2020; Everingham & Chassagne, 2020). In tourism, for example, this could mean creating a more environmentally and climate-conscious sector, having a truly sustainable sector as the baseline for all further policies and actions (Everingham & Chassagne, 2020). Today, we see a fast recovery of tourism numbers from setbacks, continuing along business-as-usual practices. The increase in international arrivals shows, that not only within Europe but globally, tourism activities resume on the path to pre-pandemic numbers (UNWTO, 2022a). As Klein (2007) in Fletcher (2011) points out, neo-liberal capitalism has the power to turn crisis into opportunity, by focusing on economic growth in times of crisis, such as the current Covid-19 pandemic. Tourism and capitalism are conjoined, increasing tourism activities ensures growth and with that the capitalist wheel keeps turning, leading to the acceleration of climate change according to Bianchi and de Man (2021). The emphasis on tourism development to resume to tourism numbers of 2019 is illustrated by the UNWTO. The organization emphasizes that tourism is on its way back to pre-pandemic levels and that the sector is recovering faster than expected and that there is much hope for tourism to become more resilient to future shocks. For the UNWTO, growth, and sustainability go hand in hand, therefore their main objective is to enhance growth through sustainability (UNWTO, 2022e).

However, since the 1970s when the Club of Rome published ‘The Limits to Growth’ report, growth has been criticized (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). More recently, the United Nations specialized agency for tourism, the UNWTO, has been criticized by scholars. The UNWTO is focusing on a strong recovery of the tourism sector (UNWTO, 2022b) and promoting “responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism” (UNWTO, 2022c). According to tourism scholars, one of the main objectives of the UNWTO seems to be growth and quick recovery from potential setbacks as mentioned above (Fletcher et al., 2019). Supporting those who are affected the greatest by the pandemic seems to be among the

main goals of the UNWTO. Tourism has been regarded as a great tool for development all over the globe, as growth in the local tourism sector generates economic stability and prosperity, according to the UNWTO.

As scholars argue, the dominant growth agenda within the tourism industry must be challenged, especially considering human-induced changes in the environment and the contribution tourism has, to accelerate climate change (e.g., Ruddy et al., 2015; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018). More growth can have tremendous consequences on our planet, for example, resource extraction and depletion (Hall, 2010; Bianchi & de Man, 2021). However, Higgins-Desbiolles and colleagues (2019) argue that because of neoliberal capitalism, tourism is rooted in a pro-growth ideology and therefore leads to issues regarding overtourism, for example. Therefore, as part of the neoliberal capitalist system, the growth agenda within tourism appears to be taken for granted by the UNWTO, according to Gascón (2019), and seems to be solely challenged by academia and experts, recognizing mass tourism and overtourism in specific places (Milano, Novelli & Cheer, 2019). Additionally, Milano and colleagues (2019) identify the growth agenda of tourism as outdated considering well-known and thoroughly researched negative consequences on the environment and society and are calling for a shift in tourism development and planning. Furthermore, growth within the tourism sector is normalized by focusing on fulfilling the SDGs, which at the same time ignores the social and environmental injustice produced by this growth agenda, according to Bianchi and de Man (2021). Articles published in 2020 highlighted that the Covid-19 pandemic could be the breaking point for the tourism sector to operate as business-as-usual, and instead move away from unsustainable consumption of tourism (Brouder, 2020; Everingham & Chassagne, 2020), however, little has happened since.

1.1. Problem statement

Within this thesis, I focus on tourism development discourses produced by the UNWTO that reveal ideologies within their tourism agenda. Instead of more growth in the tourism sector, scholars emphasize degrowth within tourism, which entails a shift towards using fewer resources in our lives and with that also reducing greenhouse gas emissions (Fletcher et al., 2019). Therefore, this thesis seeks to analyze tourism development discourses in the UNWTO and whether degrowth is also addressed by the organization. Increasingly, scholars are criticizing the growth agenda within the tourism industry, and more specifically the UNWTO as stimulating the sector into business-as-usual after the Covid-19 pandemic. Critics of growth are concerned with the finite capacities of the planet to grow, whilst the tourism industry is stimulating more growth. Further, as Asara et al. (2015) and Gascón (2019) argue, the growth paradigm of tourism is taken for granted within the Western economies and has not been challenged by the tourism industry itself. As Daly (2008) in Hall (2009) points out, “the growth economy is failing” (p. 13). We need to critically examine the dominant discourses within the UNWTO, and focus on the ideologies of the organization, as dominant ideologies are oftentimes left unchallenged. However, the discourses that are created through ideology are reproduced within the tourism industry. It must be analyzed how the dominant tourism development discourses prevail in the UNWTO and how the ideologies maintain or potentially undermine the discourses in the organization.

It becomes clear that whilst there is a lot of critique and problematization of the growth agenda within the tourism industry and especially the UNWTO, academic critiques remain anecdotal. Whilst scholars mostly base their critique on what has been produced in reports and official statements of UNWTO officials, a closer look into the organization and its mechanisms that reproduce the status quo

is missing. It appears there is little research on how the tourism development discourses within the organization are constructed, as well as how these discourses prevail. So far, no study has identified and analyzed the ideologies of the UNWTO that exist in the social reality of the organization. This thesis is aiming to analyze discourses to identify the underlying ideologies currently prevailing in the UNWTO. In addition, I analyzed if scholarly claims made about the UNWTO are also reflected in my findings regarding tourism growth and if degrowth implications within the organization are made.

Whilst Higgins-Desbiolles (2022) has made a start in her recent publications pointing out the “growth ideology” (p. 2) of the UNWTO, there is much more that should be analyzed in this regard. The study mentions the growth ideology in one section only and presents counterarguments for degrowth. Even though the article is very relevant and is a good start to discussing ideologies of large organizations such as the UNWTO, it does not go into theoretical and methodological detail and a deeper analysis of the ideology of the UNWTO. Therefore, this thesis aims to fill this gap and give a more in-depth analysis of the ideologies within the UNWTO and analyze what remains absent in tourism development discourses. By setting up a typology of combining different ideologies, the discourses can be better analyzed regarding ideologies that may maintain, reproduce, and potentially undermine the UNWTO tourism development discourses.

1.2. Research objective and research questions

Based on the increasing amount of critique that scholars place on the tourism industry the research objective of this thesis is to explore tourism development discourses of the UNWTO. Through desk research and interviews with UNWTO employees and external advisors of the UNWTO, different tourism development discourses in the UNWTO are analyzed. Additionally, this thesis takes a step further and identifies ideologies in the organization through second-order observation to find out how the discourses are maintained and supported by these ideologies.

The following research questions were formulated for this thesis:

- RQ1: Which discourses about tourism development are present in the UNWTO?
- SRQ1: How did the discourses in the UNWTO evolve over time?
- RQ2: What are the main ideologies that are present within the UNWTO regarding tourism development?

1.3. Introduction of the case study

To answer the research questions, RQ1 ‘Which discourses about tourism development are present in the UNWTO?’, SRQ1 ‘How did the discourses in the UNWTO evolve over time?’ and RQ2 ‘What are the main ideologies that are present within the UNWTO regarding tourism development?’ as a case I chose the UNWTO. This choice rests on my fascination for this organization and its scope as it is the specialized UN agency for tourism. Throughout my studies, the UNWTO is frequently referenced by tourism scholars for statistics and global tourism trends. The organization is setting the tone for tourism worldwide, as it presents itself as serving “as a global forum for tourism policy issues and a practical source of tourism know-how” (World Tourism Organization, 2015, p. 12). Additionally, they promote “responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism” (UNWTO, 2022c). The first General Assembly of the UNWTO took place in Madrid in 1975 (Healy & Carvao, 2016). Back then, the UNWTO was called the International Union of Official Travel Organization. During the General

Assembly in 1975, the organization got its new name, World Tourism Organization (Healy & Carvao, 2016). The organization got the abbreviation UNWTO in 2005 after the intergovernmental organization became part of the United Nations as a specialized agency in 2003 (Healy & Carvao, 2016). By becoming a specialized agency of the UN, the organization would gain legitimacy, authority, and power (Shackleford, 2020).

The UNWTO “serves as a global forum for tourism policy issues and a practical source of tourism know-how” (World Tourism Organization, 2005, p. 12) as a specialized agency of the UN. Currently, the UNWTO, next to 160 member states, consists of six associate members, and over 500 affiliate members (UNWTO, 2022b). According to Gascón (2019), the UNWTO is influenced and determined by the business sector, which consists of those 500 affiliate members that include travel agencies and the hospitality sector as well as the mobility industry. These members are part of committees that are in control of policymaking within the UNWTO, so Gascón (2019). Furthermore, the UNWTO has five main bodies, that are responsible for its administrative and financial activities (Healy & Carvao, 2016). These five bodies are “the General Assembly, the Executive Council, the Regional Commissions, the Committees, and the Secretariat” (Healy & Carvao, 2016).

Article 3.1 of the UNWTO basic document states the aim of the UNWTO:

“The fundamental aim of the Organization shall be the promotion and development of tourism with a view to contributing to economic development, international understanding, peace, prosperity, and universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. The Organization shall take all appropriate action to attain this objective.” (WTO, 2021b, p. 15).

In 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by all United Nations member states and are part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (World Tourism Organization and United Nations Development Programme, 2017). The UNWTO especially focuses on SDG 8, “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” (UNWTO, 2015a), SDG 12, and SDG 14 on responsible consumption and production, and life below water. Every year on the 27th of September, the UNWTO celebrates ‘World Tourism Day’ together with the tourism sector. Celebrated for the first time in 1980, because of the occasion of the implementation of the Statues of the Organization in 1970, contributing to the establishment of the UNWTO in 1975 (World Tourism Organization, n.d.).

The UNWTO defines sustainable tourism as “[t]ourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities” (UNWTO, 2022d). As described by Hall (2010), the UNWTO guides policymaking for tourism, promoting sustainability and environmentally responsible tourism, and creating economic benefits for destinations and businesses. Because of the recent setbacks in the tourism industry, such as the financial crisis and the global Covid-19 pandemic, tourism numbers have declined drastically and come to a complete standstill. As a response to the setback of the tourism sector, the UNWTO created a “Roadmap to Recovery” that aims to restart tourism growth (Fletcher et al., 2019). In addition, the UNWTO is currently “Rethinking tourism”, sparked by the Covid-19 pandemic and its urgency to reevaluate tourism globally. In this thesis, the UNWTO is hereafter referred to as either the organization or the UNWTO.

1.4. Thesis structure

This thesis is structured as follows. Comprised of seven chapters, chapter 2 concerns the literature review of relevant academic literature about tourism growth, sustainability in tourism, and degrowth and the tourism sector, providing a better overview of which theme this research is situated. Thereafter, chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework which provides a more detailed description of the function of discourse theory and the post-structural paradigm it is embedded in and the function of ideology. Additionally, the modalities of ideology that are important to analyze are presented in the theoretical framework. In chapter 4, I explain the qualitative study design, the methods used for data collection, and how the data was analyzed. Validity, reliability, and limitations are also discussed. This is followed by chapter 5, presenting the results of the thorough discourse analysis of documents and interviews. Chapter 6 presents the analysis and findings of the ideologies, using the theoretical framework as a lens. In chapter 7, the conclusion presents answers to the research questions. The findings are further discussed and connected to academia which was reviewed in chapter 2. Finally, recommendations for future research are given.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

The following chapter provides an overview of the current discussions in tourism literature that offer a deeper insight into tourism growth debates and the critiques of scholars on tourism organizations. In addition, literature about sustainability debates in tourism is reviewed, as well as degrowth discussions, which has been considered by scholars to be a radical alternative to growth.

2.1. Growth in tourism and its discontent

Tourism growth has been a focal point of discussion by many scholars. As Fletcher (2011) pointed out, many articles begin by outlining how much tourism has grown in the past and is still on that growth trajectory. Historically speaking, humans have always been mobile, moving from one place to another. According to Hall, Lundmark, and Zhang (2020), tourism is part of the extension of the history of human mobility. Previous research however has considered growth in the tourism sector as increasingly problematic. Being one of the largest industries in the world, tourism is thriving through growth and with that plays a huge part in the capitalistic world economy, according to Fletcher (2011). This growth, as Fletcher et al. (2019) argue, is predicted to increase in the future as well. Continuous growth powers the engine of capitalism and consumption, according to Bianchi and de Man (2021), leading to the acceleration of climate change.

Bianchi and de Man (2021) furthermore mention that growth is a principal mechanism for the continual expansion of capitalism. In addition, Büscher and Fletcher (2017) describe tourism as a capitalist practice, in which growth powers the engine of capitalism, leading to the acceleration of climate change, according to Bianchi and de Man (2021). Similarly, Gascón (2019) argues, that by focusing on the economic incentive of tourism, stakeholders and organizations within the industry are solely oriented on continuous growth in the industry and enabling more and more tourism all over the world. Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019) go so far in calling out the tourism industry for having a “growth fetish” (p. 1929). In times of crisis, neoliberal capitalism is regarded as having the power to turn crisis into opportunity, as Klein (2007) in Fletcher (2011) points out, by focusing on economic growth in times of crisis. Tourism and capitalism go hand in hand according to scholars, and increasing tourism activities ensures that the capitalist wheel keeps turning. According to Fitzpatrick, Parrique, and Cosme (2022), economic growth is deeply desired by policymakers as they fear moving away from the status quo that we are so used to in the Western world.

2.1.1. Growth’s discontent

Several scholars have argued that the UNWTO is also focusing on continuous growth and therefore has a growth agenda (Dwyer, 2018; Gascón, 2019; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2022). Gascón (2019) states that the UNWTO is a growth-oriented organization since they are steered by the interests of the industry and criticizes that the organization should rather look at how to limit and regulate tourism instead of focusing on this growth agenda. However, the UNWTO has also been regarded as one of the vital actors when it comes to institutionalizing tourism and representing the interests of the tourism industry (Gascón, 2019). Also, Dwyer (2018) points out, the UNWTO has an “explicit growth ethic” (p. 36) and criticizes that economic growth and the focus on the increase of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is not equal to the quality of life and human development. This furthermore shows that economic growth does not go together with social well-being, an increase in happiness, and other factors, as Dwyer (2018) argues. Similarly, Hall (2010) has pointed out that the advocated increase in consumption of

tourism goods that is encouraged by tourism marketing does not suggest an acceleration of livelihood. We are not necessarily having a better life, however, that is what the ideologies of capitalism that steer marketing and tourism institutions imply, according to Hall (2010).

According to Higgins-Desbiolles (2022), the UNWTO has a growth agenda that the organization has been portraying for many years until the Covid-19 pandemic. She describes this to be an example of the alleged growth ideology that creates an array of issues regarding sustainability and justice in tourism. Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) furthermore points out that all efforts to increase sustainability in tourism are being undermined by the industry and governments whose ideology is shaped by the neoliberal paradigm that endorses infinite growth (p. 159). It has been criticized that the UNWTO has a growth ideology and that it is regarded as a global marketing body that is advertising tourism growth (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2022, p. 6).

2.1.2. Green growth and sustainable growth

Scholars have identified that the UNWTO has multiple ways to address growth, such as 'sustainable growth' and 'green growth', both of which have been criticized by many scholars (e.g., Hickel, 2018; Butcher, 2021; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2022). Hickel (2018) criticizes that 'green growth' cannot be achieved, as humanity has already exceeded some of the planetary boundaries and uses too many resources to sustain our capitalist society. According to Gössling, Scott, and Hall (2013), 'green growth' in tourism justifies continuous growth by adding the component of meeting emission reduction targets, these are however not feasible, according to the scholars (p. 534). However, Georgeson, Maslin, and Poessinouw (2017) argue, that the green economy could help to achieve the SDGs and the post-2015 agenda, with caveats of the plans designed on an international, national, and regional level. Furthermore, Sharpley (2022) states, some regard green growth or sustainable growth as solving the environmental crisis, nonetheless this means that technological fixes need to be in place to decouple from the exploitation of finite natural resources for production, according to the scholar.

However, Asara et al. (2015) argue, though green developments and eco-efficiencies within the tourism sector are overall positive, the economic gains achieved are further re-invested into consumption, which is precisely the opposite of what they ought to be. Capitalism, as further argued by Asara et al. (2015), does not take the natural resources it is dependent on into account, leading to economic growth exceeding the resources available and making it unsustainable and unjust. Additionally, Hall (2010) highlights that tourism growth is uneconomic by diminishing natural capital, whilst Sharpley (2022) states, that economic growth is currently still increasing and is recognized more frequently as being unsustainable regarding the environment.

2.1.3. Growth causing environmental change

Tourism has been regarded as one of the sectors that contribute highly to increased greenhouse gases due to for example heavily relying on airplane travel and is therefore responsible for climate change and biodiversity loss (Hall, 2009; Rutty et al., 2015). Production and consumption cause the overexploitation of natural resources, and with that exceeding the just space for humanity to live and operate in, overshooting planetary boundaries, according to Rockström et al. (2009), Higgins-Desbiolles & Everingham (2022) and Fletcher et al. (2021). Researchers argue that this human-induced change is leading the Earth from the Holocene to the Anthropocene (Steffen, Broadgate, Deutsch, Gaffney & Ludwig, 2015; Huijbens, 2021). To stay within the planetary boundaries, Hickel (2018) among others, e.g., Bianchi and de Man (2021), Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019), argue that we must

move away from economic growth that we know and downscale the pace of production. Overall, whereas tourism has been regarded as one of the most important economic sectors, scholars also critique the tourism sector for its growth agenda.

2.2. Tourism, sustainability, and its discontent

The problems with growth outlined by scholars in the previous section are oftentimes assumed to be solved by sustainability and transitioning towards a more sustainable tourism sector. In this regard, green growth and sustainable growth are frequently focused on in the tourism industry, to legitimize tourism growth, as Saarinen (2020) points out. It has been argued that the definition of sustainability is oftentimes vague and broadly defined and adjustable to whomever's liking to fit into the specific context, according to Butler (2018). Similarly, Sharpley (2000) describes sustainable tourism as an 'adaptive pathway', as the principles of the concept can be adjusted based on the situation for it to make sense. Sustainability has also been regarded as an empty signifier by many scholars, meaning that due to its emptiness in meaning, it can be adjusted to different situations and given differing connotations (Brown, 2016). Sustainable tourism has been defined by many scholars, though Butler (1999) seems to be giving one of the most well-known and classic definitions, by stating that sustainable tourism is "tourism which is in a form which can maintain its viability in an area for an indefinite period of time" (1999, p. 36, in Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018, p. 157). According to Scheyvens and Cheer (2021), within the tourism industry, all the sustainability efforts may indicate that tourism is sustainable, however, they argue that it is not. As Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) explains, taking the very literal definition of sustainability, as in preserving what we have for generations to come, sustaining tourism as we know it is not sustainable tourism.

One aspect mentioned by Monbiot (2012) in Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) is, that sustainability may be the opposite of sustained growth, as growth on our planet with finite resources is simply impossible and the principle of unsustainability. Similarly, Saarinen (2020) describes the "sustainable tourism growth mantra" (p. 144) that entails sustaining tourism as inherently unsustainable within the neoliberal capitalist world. In addition to that, Hall (2010) argues, that the impact of tourism on the environment has been widely ignored and that this impact has grown tremendously with a great effect globally. The tourism industry needs to shift how sustainability is thought about and acted upon, more concretely to focus on conservation and protecting natural capital according to Hall (2010).

According to Ruddy (2015), the numerous publications on sustainable tourism that alter the definition to fit their purpose invalidate its sustainability, although the focus of the tourism industry, especially national governments, and supranational institutions (e.g., UNWTO) is on sustainable tourism. Furthermore, Benson and Craig (2014) argue that trying to reach sustainability is not fitting to strive to address environmental and social challenges on this planet. Hall (2019) further states, that rather than being embedded in ethical considerations and environmental concerns, sustainability is positioned as having economic and competitive importance. This means, according to Hall (2019), that when the term sustainability is used, it has an economic rather than an environmental incentive. Sustainable tourism has furthermore been criticized by scholars, as Fletcher (2011) emphasizes that the discourse of 'sustainable tourism' is a key one in the global tourism industry, as it is feeding into the capitalist growth of this economy. In addition, Fletcher and Rammelt (2017) argue that by using sustainable development globally, one is disguising that there are environmental boundaries that prevent more economic growth. The overall consensus in the literature reviewed is that sustainable developments regarding safeguarding the environment and minimizing the use of resources are not possible.

According to Higgins-Desbiolles (2018), 'sustainability' is used to mask business-as-usual and economic gains, and it has been argued that the concept of sustainability is outdated and simply not achievable when it comes to tourism. As Brouder (2020) has concluded, tourism is not likely to transform to become more climate-conscious and better for the environment, as the attempts for sustainable development are quickly overshadowed by business-as-usual. Butler (2018) furthermore states, sustainable tourism is tourism that does not involve traveling, which then leads to social and economic effects that are unfavorable for many tourism destinations. Similarly, Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) points out that "sustaining tourism is not a sustainable form of tourism" (p. 159), which indicates that the whole concept of sustainability in tourism needs to be reconsidered, based on the tourism industry following a growth agenda, even in times of polycrisis. Hall and Wood (2021) argue that there are many ways of sustainability thought, mostly considering degrowth thinking and Buen Vivir as well as affluence without growth. Truly sustainable tourism however, as explained by Fletcher and colleagues (2021), requires a degrowth agenda, which includes a reduction of economic development in the Global North, diminishing economic activity to more sustainable levels of production and consumption.

2.3. Degrowth in tourism as a growth alternative

A 'radical' alternative to green growth and sustainability, degrowth has been considered which concerns the shift to a reduction in the consumption of resources and especially by decreasing greenhouse gas emissions, according to Fletcher et al. (2019). Fletcher and colleagues (2019) additionally argue that degrowth is furthermore described to surpass the dominant growth paradigm. According to Gascón (2019), degrowth has emerged as a trend rooted in social movements as well as academic writings on Political Economy. It aims at promoting a decrease in economic activity in a controlled way, so Gascón (2019). Furthermore, it is less about being the counterpart to growth, but about adjusting to the environmental capacities within an economy, as Hall (2010) describes. According to Asara and colleagues (2015), degrowth is targeting re-politicizing discourses surrounding the relationship of sustainability within society, and the economy.

As Fitzpatrick and colleagues (2022) state, capitalism, overexploitation of natural resources, and social deficiency call for degrowth. Also, Higgins-Desbiolles and colleagues (2019) argue that tourism must be redesigned in such a way that local people can benefit from tourism whilst tourism businesses should not be able to make more profit out of it, for sustainable degrowth to happen. Furthermore, Fletcher (2011) argues that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have expressed that the only way of 'sustainable travel' is to travel less overall. When considering sustainability and sustainable tourism, Hall, and Wood (2021) claim, that this can only be achieved by decoupling from natural capital and minimizing production and consumption to a sustainable level, which does not reduce natural capital.

According to Büscher and Fletcher, (2017), tourism must degrow which also regards consumption and production as well as sustainability, instead of solely focusing on plateauing the growth currently happening. As argued by Swyngedouw, (2014), neoliberal growth is problematic and therefore, degrowth and a de-politicization of growth need to be implied where possible. Fitzpatrick and colleagues (2022) point out, based on their extensive meta-analysis of degrowth papers in tourism, that tourism should be reconceptualized, emphasizing the importance of limiting and regulating tourism. As Fletcher et al. (2019) argue, to proceed with degrowth activities within the tourism industry and challenging the growth paradigm would be a grand task and would ask for changing this whole growth-driven industry and its core. According to tourism literature, tourism growth has been dominant for many years in the industry, accounting for an increase in visitor numbers every year.

Fletcher et al. (2019) furthermore state that degrowth discourses center around principles of conviviality, governance, and shared creation of economy and society. Degrowth is also aimed at decentralizing the economic and societal narratives and can be compared to several examples from all over the world, such as Ubuntu and Buen Vivir, as Asara et al. (2015) point out.

Many scholars, such as Asara et al. (2015) and Gascón (2019) argue that the growth agenda of tourism is taken for granted within the Western economies and has not been challenged by the tourism industry itself. As Bianchi and de Man (2021) point out, the relationship between tourism, the degradation of the environment, inequalities, poverty as well as resource exploitation within this capitalistic growth paradigm is not acknowledged as such. Gascón (2019) criticizes the UNWTO for not being focused on limiting or reducing this growth agenda and ignoring the negative effects that growth may have on ecosystems and populations. Growth has been criticized to feed into the capitalistic goals of the development of the economy without taking the downsides of growth into account, such as the degradation and depletion of natural resources (Bianchi & de Man, 2021). Additionally, as Gascón (2019) argues, the dilemma of tourism is not to increase the tourism sector any longer, so it does not plateau, but to combat those advocating degrowth and limitations from a pro-growth standpoint.

Sharpley (2022) emphasizes that instead of continuous growth in the tourism industry, rethinking tourism must take place, taking degrowth into account. Furthermore, degrowth entails that the production of goods and commodities as well as the consumption of goods needs to be majorly reduced, however at the same time, growth should be able to be maintained in less developed societies for a more equal distribution of wealth and prosperity worldwide, according to Sharpley (2022). Rethinking tourism, Fletcher et al. (2021), argue that taken from a degrowth point of view, could lead to a greater change in the way in which humans think about traveling, such as short-term trips, long-haul flights and choosing the fastest mode of transport, that adhere more to a post-capitalist way of life. As Fletcher et al. (2021) point out, growth is essential for capitalism and therefore moving away from growth and obtaining a degrowth way of thinking and agenda means abolishing capitalism. This has also been criticized by Hall (2010), one of the fundamental challenges is to move away from the idea that tourism can be sustainable whilst also growing economically.

To sum up, the growth agenda of tourism has been widely discussed and criticized by scholars, arguing that we need to move away from neoliberalist thinking and the capitalist growth economy as we are exceeding planetary boundaries that allow this growth to happen. Scholars claim that sustainable tourism entails moving away from the neoliberal mindset of a never-ending increase in consumption and adapting degrowth strategies. Additionally, scholars argue that green growth and sustainable growth cannot exist as they are still promoting growth and are a contradiction in themselves. As growth is essential for capitalism, quitting the growth agenda and obtaining a degrowth way of thinking means abolishing capitalism, according to Fletcher et al. (2021). One of the fundamental challenges is to move away from the idea that tourism can be sustainable whilst also growing economically, according to Hall (2010). As Saarinen (2020) explains, moving away from the sustainable growth rhetoric that is embedded in the tourism sector is the first step to developing a truly sustainable agenda in tourism governance.

This thesis, therefore, is situated within this assertion, that tourism growth has gotten a lot of attention in the past as the dominant paradigm in tourism. At the same time, there is a lot of critique on this growth agenda and the issues that come with growth are often assumed to be able to be solved with

sustainability and green developments. Sustainability is regularly used to suit the current situations at hand to legitimize tourism growth, as discussed by scholars. Additionally, some scholars argue more radically that degrowth is an alternative to growth, which is focused on changing the neoliberal paradigm and delegitimizing growth. The dominant scholarly critique is that sustainable developments do not contribute towards sustainable growth, as sustainable growth as such does not exist. As a result, tourism scholars emphasize the implementation of degrowth and fundamentally transform the neoliberal capitalist system away from its growth agenda and the growth ideology of the tourism sector.

Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework

Through a post-structuralist approach, using discourse theory with a focus on ideology, the research question about what the dominant discourses within the UNWTO are, as well as how these discourses have changed over time and which ideologies lay behind those is answered in this thesis. The following section presents the theoretical framework including a closer examination of poststructuralism and discourse theory focusing on the concept of ideology and identifying four different forms of ideology.

3.1. Discourse theory in the poststructuralist tradition

Discourse theory is used to analyze dominating discourses by the UNWTO and how these discourses prevail. 'Discourse' as a term has many different meanings and is interpreted in many ways by academics, however, the literal meaning of it is given by the Cambridge Dictionary (2022a), which defines discourse as communicating in speech or writing. According to Fairclough (1997), through discourses, meanings are created as elements of social process. Van Brussel, Carpentier and de Cleen (2018) define discourses as a social construction that then results in systems of relations between different practices and agents. The definition of Hajer (2006) is used in this thesis, describing discourse as

“an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices” (p. 67).

This research is executed through a poststructuralist lens, and by using discourse theory. As discourses are created through language and cannot reflect reality, as an objective reality does not exist, poststructuralism is the most suitable lens to use in this thesis. A more detailed explanation of the lens used in this thesis is given in Chapter 4.

3.2. Ideology

Being situated in a post-structural approach, analyzing utterances by the UNWTO using discourse theory, this research aims to analyze the ideologies in which the growth agenda of the UNWTO prevails. Growth in the tourism industry has been criticized by scholars for quite some time now, however, it has not yet been analyzed where this growth agenda is grounded in. Therefore, the concept of ideology needs to be further elaborated on. Historically, Marx has been one of the first to acknowledge how significant the dependence of ideology on our environment is within our society (Roucek, 1944). Furthermore, other scholars have critically examined the concept of ideology, such as Antonio Gramsci and the Frankfurt School (Cole, 2021). This thesis uses the definition of ideology as a set of ideas or a belief system that is shared by members of the same social group, that are fundamentally embedded and regulate and shape beliefs that are shared in this group (Van Dijk, 1998, 2006). However, as Van Dijk (2006) points out, not all members of one social reality share the same ideologies to the same extent (p. 119). According to his work, there are experts in one social group that embody ideologies stronger than others, and that reproduce the group ideology much more than others (Van Dijk, 2006).

As identified by Žižek (2008a), Marx offers the elementary definition of ideology, being “they do not know it, but they are doing it” (p. 24). Furthermore, 'ideology' by Tribe (2006) is defined as referring to “the common sense set of beliefs (often implicit) permeating society which guides through action”

(p. 374). Simplified this means that 'ideology' is the veil that is covering our eyes from seeing the truth, according to Tribe (2006). Although some argue that there is no fundamental truth and so there will always be a veil covering the eyes, others such as Žižek (2008a) argue that "simple metaphors" (p. 25) of demasking should be avoided, as reality does not exist and is therefore also not hidden by a veil. Žižek mentions the Frankfurt School which describes it as an issue of not uncovering reality as such but as identifying that certain realities are reproduced by "ideological mystification" (p. 25). Furthermore, it has been argued that behind every "unmasking" of reality, another reality exists and therefore, one true reality can never be uncovered (Žižek, 2008a). As Žižek (2008a) describes the "fundamental level of ideology, however, is not that of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself" (p. 30).

Ideologies "typically serve to legitimate power and inequality" (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 138). As identified by Wodak (2002), in critical discourse theory, ideology can be used to uphold differing power relations. Ideologies evolve through the subjective interpretation, understanding, and reproduction of social members (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 137). We believe in ideologies without knowing that they are ideologies, that we take for granted within our society, whilst these ideologies are then reproduced, as Žižek (2008a) puts it. Van Dijk (2006) describes ideologies as the base of discourses of members of social groups. Ideologies can therefore be uncovered through discourse analysis as not only what is written or said is analyzed, but also the context in which it is uttered (Zanotto, 2020). Furthermore, Zanotto (2020) states that ideologies are revealed once alternatives arise to see the currently prevailing discourses that challenge what we think reality to its fullest is all about with the claims that we take for granted (p. 104).

In critical discourse analysis, ideologies of organizations and groups of people can be better identified and understood in terms of how these ideologies are created, appear, and work (Van Dijk, 1998 in Zanotto, 2020). Uncovering ideologies within discourses produced by the UNWTO is important, as they might provide a deeper insight into the business-as-usual critiques articulated by scholars regarding growth. Wodak and Meyer (2009) note that the ideology of society will be influenced by organizations that aim for more power to 'manipulate' society to believe that there are no alternatives to the ideology they know as the status quo. Within a social group, ideologies exist that the social members of the group are not aware of.

Through discourses, meanings are created as they reproduce and transform the social status quo (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). At the same time, discourses are shaped by our social reality and are something that we are aware of and that we know, and we also know that there are alternatives to the main discourses that structure our social reality. Ideologies on the other hand operate on a level underneath discourses, that shape discourses in our social reality, and we as social actors are not aware of these ideologies that we are often not aware of acting within these ideologies. We can, however, also be aware of these ideologies, for example by being introduced to a different social reality, and nonetheless, do what we do anyway regardless of us knowing very well what we are doing. Through the existence of ideologies, discourses are produced and reproduced. Additionally, dominant ideologies are adhering to presumptions that are not contested as they remain hidden and mostly unnoticed (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

3.2.1. Modalities of ideology

There are different types of ideology that I would like to focus on and explain in the next section. In this thesis, the explanations of ideology that are differentiated by Žižek and others are used, to construct four different modes of ideology. Those modes are pure ideology, blind ideology, unknown knowns as ideology, ideological fantasy, and cynical ideology. I would like to acknowledge that there are other scholars next to Žižek that have critically examined ideology in their research, however, this thesis builds on Žižek's work on ideology and expands on it further. In the following section, I provide more in-depth explanations of what is meant by the types of ideologies that are analyzed in chapter 7.

Pure ideology by Žižek discusses ideology at its purest, that an objective neutral reality does not exist. There are underlying beliefs and ideas that structure our social reality, that we might not be aware of, as the values and beliefs shape the way in which we perceive our social reality that remains undisputed (Žižek, 2008a). Pure ideology furthermore entails that the subject is overlooking that it has its own presuppositions of its social reality that present a distorted social reality that is shaped by its false consciousness of it (Žižek, 2008a). To make this abstract more comprehensive, Žižek uses the example of fairtrade biological chocolate and makes use of the concept of surplus enjoyment by Lacan that can be seen as the constitutive of all capitalist consumption (SRF Kultur Sternstunden, 2019). By purchasing chocolate, we not only buy the physical product, but we buy the identity that we are a better person, that we are saving the planet when we buy this fairtrade biological chocolate bar instead of another one. Žižek describes that we do not buy the product because of what it is but what it represents, which is shaped by our values and beliefs that delegate our life, in his opinion, there is no ethical consumption.

Blind ideology is described as “[t]hey do not know it, but they are doing it” (Žižek, 2008a, p. 27). Here Žižek (2008a) points out Marx's definition of ideology, in which he states that one does not know what they are doing, but they are still doing it as being blind to the ideology that dominates their social reality. The illusion that we have a choice to step out of our ideology to see how the world is in ‘reality’ is the most ideological aspect that Žižek criticizes. According to him, there is no way in which we can see the purest form of reality as our ideology forms how we perceive the world. Unknown knowns are very similar to blind ideology, as Žižek (2006) describes ‘*unknown knowns*’ as an ideology as something that we know but we do not even know that we know it, hence unknown knowns. The Žižek derived the unknown knowns from Donald Rumsfeld, who published about the known knowns, “things we know that we know”; known unknowns, “things that we know we don't know”; and unknown unknowns “things we don't know that we don't know” (Žižek, 2006). Žižek adds a fourth dimension of ‘*unknown knowns*’ to this (Žižek, 2006). As Žižek (2006) mentions, it is what is in our belief system that we would not address publicly but that is deeply ingrained in the beliefs that we practice every day. These unknown knowns regulate our life as they are an essential part of our intrinsic belief system.

Ideological fantasy can be explained as that reality is based on the fantasy we have about reality, overlooking the illusion that is on the side of reality, therefore the subject is unaware that the illusion is shaping and structuring their social reality, according to Žižek (2008a, p. 30). This might be the fundamental level of ideology, according to Žižek (2008a), as an unconscious fantasy that structures our social reality. An example of ideological fantasy as described by Žižek (2008a) is that “they know that their idea of Freedom is masking a particular form of exploitation, but they still continue to follow this idea of Freedom” (p. 30).

Lastly, ideology as being cynical, Žižek (2008a) quotes Sloterdijk and states that *cynical ideology* entails that one is very well aware of what they are doing, however, they are doing it nevertheless (p. 25). As Žižek (2008a) puts it “[t]he cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he nonetheless still insists upon the mask” (p. 25). So therefore, one is very much aware of what interest lays behind the entirety of ideology but does not reject this (Žižek, 2008a, p. 26). Žižek has many ways in which he explains his definition and critiques of ideology, table 1 offers an overview of the definitions of ideology by Žižek.

Table 1 Overview of ideology by Žižek (2006, 2008a)

Ideology by Žižek	Žižek’s definition
Pure ideology	One’s social reality is shaped by values and beliefs, therefore always has an underlying meaning which remains uncontested.
Blind ideology	“They do not know it, but they are doing it” (Žižek, 2008a, p. 27).
Unknown knowns	Something that we know but we do not even know that we know it (Žižek, 2006).
Ideological fantasy	“[A]n 'illusion' which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel” (Žižek, 2008a, p. 45).
Cynical ideology	They know what they are doing, and they are doing it (Žižek, 2008a).

The four different types of ideologies presented function to either strengthen or undermine certain discourses. Pure and blind ideology including the unknown knowns overlap in a way, as the main realm entails that our social reality is shaped by values and beliefs underlying and taken for granted. Therefore, we might not know why we are doing or expressing certain things, but we are doing it. Due to our social realities being shaped by many varied factors that remain uncontested, we cannot change the way we operate as we do not know better, as ideology is shaping our reality unconsciously. Because of that, certain discourses might be undermined by pure and blind ideology as we lack better knowledge as we cannot see through the veil of pure ideology. The social reality in which we operate is not contested. Contrarily, within the ideological fantasy and cynical ideology, we are aware of the ideologies that structure our social reality; however, we pretend that we do not know to reproduce discourses within that ideology. Either our social reality is structured by an illusional fantasy, or ideologies are cynical in the way that we exactly know what we are doing but we are doing it, nonetheless.

3.3. Conceptual illustration of the theoretical framework

Using a post-structuralist lens to analyze the current discourses of the UNWTO allows an analysis from the standpoint that neither truth nor reality exists, and that they are subjective and prevailing in many ways. Using language, discourses are created which are constitutive and reproduce the status quo (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Through the lens of power, according to Foucault (1982), discourses are analyzed, and ideologies become apparent, that were not visible before. Ideologies are intricately linked to power and knowledge, as power creates knowledge and the other way around (Cheong & Miller, 2000), whilst ideologies legitimate power and inequality (Van Dijk, 1998). The research questions will be answered when considering these concepts and to further analyzing the growth discourses of the UNWTO and how the ideologies are shaped within the organization.

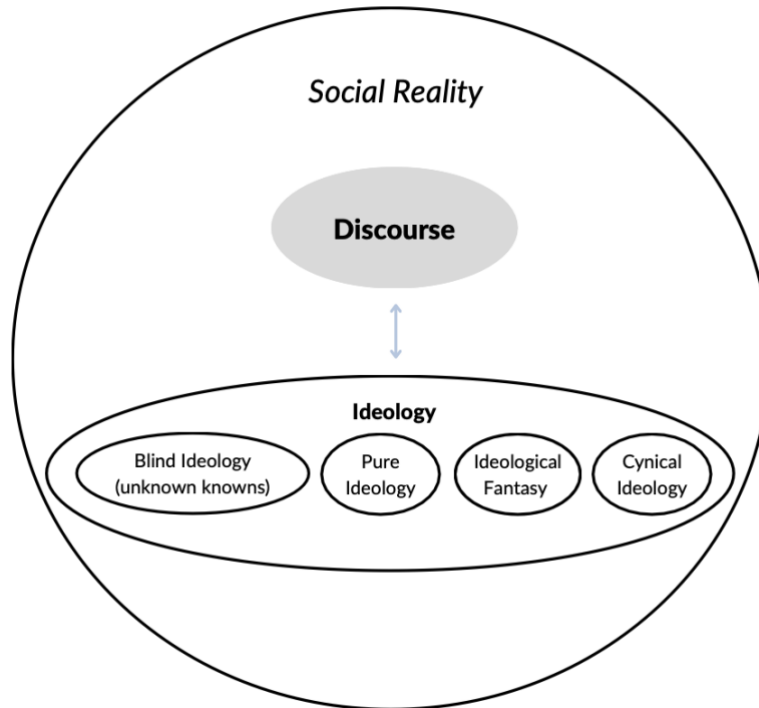


Figure 1 Conceptual illustration of the theoretical framework

The conceptual illustration of the theoretical framework (Figure 1) provides a visual explanation of the different theories and concepts used in this thesis. Discourses exist in every social reality, that can be analyzed using discourse analysis. However, what cannot be seen or is not tangible is the ideology that is shared by social members of that social reality. Ideologies can change when new concepts are introduced to the social reality, as the agents realize that social realities exist outside of their belief system. RQ1 and SRQ1 are answered by looking at data produced by the UNWTO and analyzing the discourses regarding tourism development, whilst RQ2 is answered by analyzing what lies behind the discourses that have been analyzed in RQ1 and focusing on the modalities of ideology.

Chapter 4 Methodology

To answer the above-posted research question, using a poststructuralist lens and conducting a discourse analysis seemed the most logical to me. As already shortly touched upon in chapter 3, within poststructuralism, there is no fundamental truth, and reality as such does not exist (Khan & MacEachen, 2021) as humans make sense of their own social realities. Therefore, I chose discourse analysis because it is meant to reveal different ways in which people have made sense of the world and how meanings are created that reproduce the status quo (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Combining poststructuralism, a second-order observation of how people construct and reconstruct their social reality through discourse, and discourse analysis is a good combination to answer the research questions. This thesis further aims to understand the ideologies behind tourism development discourses of the UNWTO which are formed by the ideologies that structure the organization's social reality. Discourse analysis is used to make the mechanisms that produce ideologies within the UNWTO explicit.

This qualitative study consists of data collection based on desk research and interviews with relevant employees of the UNWTO, to triangulate the outcome of the research. Through inductive reasoning, the research is more explorative, allowing for a broader perspective which then leads to certain patterns within the data collected that become clearer throughout the process. Using discourse theory, data analysis and data collection happen simultaneously, which allows it to be an iterative process, as preliminary results lead to further analysis and data collection (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

The literature review in chapter 2 provided background information and gave an overview in which academic debate this thesis is grounded in and therefore also focuses on degrowth. This is the case because next to scholars' critique on the growth agenda of the UNWTO, degrowth functions as an alternative to this taken-for-granted growth paradigm, according to degrowth literature. By including degrowth together with the critiques on growth in academia, a more well-rounded discussion about tourism development discourses in the social reality of the UNWTO can take place.

4.1. Poststructuralist lens

In this thesis, I use a poststructuralist lens to analyze discourses and ideologies. In poststructuralism, there is no way in which we can examine the nature of reality objectively. Therefore, no reality can be uncovered, as every human is constructing their reality subjectively (Humes & Bryce, 2003). The same concerns 'truth', which will also not be revealed, as post-structuralists, claim that there is no truth, but we can investigate the accuracy of truths that we commonly accept, according to Graham (2011). Post-structuralism can be used to critically examine how people have made sense of the world and how they have created knowledge about it, rather than uncovering the truth (Graham, 2011). It is more about critically examining the 'truths' that are taken for granted by social groups, according to Graham (2011). How we speak and write about things shows, that we do not neutrally perceive the world we live in, rather it reflects the subjective perception of our reality. Using a post-structuralist lens to analyze discourses allows for a close examination of the social realities of the UNWTO and its employees.

4.2. Study Design

This thesis is a qualitative study to explore the discourses currently prevailing in the UNWTO and to gain deeper insight into the ideologies behind them. The study is explorative in nature, as the discourses that evolve in the UNWTO are not clear from the beginning. The qualitative nature of the study allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the discourses and the ideologies of the data collected. The UNWTO was chosen as a focus and therefore provides the case for this study.

4.3. Methods for Data Collection

4.3.1. Desk Research

The first step of data collection was desk research, by using non-random sampling including purposive and snowball sampling, relevant literature for the literature review was retrieved (Adler & Clark, 2011). Online libraries such as Scopus, the library of Wageningen University, and Google Scholar were used to find peer-reviewed articles about relevant topics to receive important background literature. Focusing on growth and degrowth in the tourism industry, keywords such as “growth AND UNWTO”, “degrowth AND tourism” and so forth were used to find relevant articles to be used for the literature review. Snowball sampling was further used to identify more relevant literature by following sources used in the literature (Adler & Clark, 2011). To gain a better understanding of the dominant discourses of the UNWTO, reports published by the organization were collected. By using the online library (e-library) of the UNWTO, different documents such as annual reports and tourism highlight reports published in 2000 onwards were collected.

The search terms ‘annual report’, ‘tourism highlights and ‘sustainable development’ were used to search for more reports highlighting these themes in UNWTO literature. Based on the SDGs introduced in 2015 at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015, UNWTO reports, more specifically Annual Reports from 2015-2018 were more closely reviewed, as well as UNWTO annual highlights reports from 2018-2020. Reports regarding World Tourism Day 2022 and the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism have been collected as well, to get a deeper insight into current publications of the UNWTO. Through non-random purposive sampling, content published on media outlets was reviewed and analyzed, such as the recordings of panel discussions and events hosted by the UNWTO. In total, 23 documents and two videos of panel discussions were analyzed, the document length ranged from two to 114 pages, with a median of 48 pages. Appendix A, table 3 shows an overview of the collected data from desk research. Not all data appeared relevant after the first round of reading, therefore, some reports were not further elaborated on.

4.3.2. Interviews

Secondly, empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Potential participants that I reached out to purposefully were chosen on a few criteria, first, they had to either work at the UNWTO or be an advisor for the organization. It was important for me not only to have a European view on the matter, but to interview people from around the world, and I was striving for a balance of gender among my interviewees, all to increase the validity of my findings. Officials and employees working at the UNWTO were interviewed, as well as external advisors for the UNWTO. Through snowball sampling, more relevant potential participants to give insights into the matter were reached out to via LinkedIn (Adler & Clark, 2011). The interviewees work in Europe, South America, the Asian Pacific, and Oceania. The interviews took place on various platforms online, through MS Teams and Zoom, and LinkedIn video calls. Because this research was dependent on the availability of the

interview participants, interviews were planned accordingly, considering different time zones, and working schedules. The interviews were semi-structured, to allow more flexibility and to more easily adjust to the answers provided during the interviews (Adler & Clark, 2011).

The data collection phase started at the beginning of November and lasted until the end of January, as the availability of interviewees varied, and some interviews were planned months in advance with UNWTO officials. Data collection was stopped when saturation was reached and due to time restrictions. In total, five people that work at or for the UNWTO have been interviewed, which is lower than the intended number of interviewees that was initially set, however, due to the difficulty to get into contact with UNWTO officials, the number remained five. Initially, six participants agreed to be interviewed, however, one of these participants agreed to answer the questions via email, and after sending the questions I never received an answer, also not after checking in a few times via mail afterward.

The interviews took place with the following participants, A. Priante, who is the director of the UNWTO regional department for Europe, T. Agovino, who is a sustainable tourism consultant for the UNWTO, based in Italy, and publishing consultancy reports with the UNWTO. Another external international consultant, S. Noakes was interviewed, who is a specialist for the Asian Pacific and has been working with the UNWTO as a consultant for a long time. F. Soto is the Green Destination representative in Chile and a UNWTO Academy Disseminator. The fifth interviewee works at one of the departments at the main UNWTO office in Madrid and wished to remain anonymous. Table 2 provides an overview of the interview participants. On average, the duration of the interviews was 34 minutes, one was only 15 minutes, and the longest interview was about 58 minutes long. Due to the online setting of the interviews, the interviews were recorded either through zoom, MS teams, or with the voice recorder of a phone. In addition, all interviews were transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

Table 2 Overview of Interview Participants

Interviewee Name	Occupation	Date of Interview	Duration of interview
A. Priante	Director of Regional Department for Europe, UNWTO	18.11.2022	15 minutes
T. Agovino	Sustainable tourism consultant for UNWTO	22.11.2022	35 minutes
S. Noakes	International consultant, UNWTO	01.12.2022	31 minutes
F. Soto	Disseminator of UNWTO Academy programs	02.12.2022	58 minutes
Anonymous P5 in text	Employee at one of the departments at UNWTO	25.01.2023	33 minutes

4.4. Data Analysis

Research question 1 and secondary research question 1 were answered through data analysis using discourse theory. The data collected was composed of UNWTO documents, such as Annual Reports, Tourism Highlight Reports and other UNWTO publications. Furthermore, the interviews were transcribed and added to the number of documents reviewed. Because of the large amount of data collected, this data was first organized chronologically, then it was reviewed, and notes were taken and summarized. These notes and summaries of the data have been further organized into separate sections based on discourses that became apparent through the data analysis phase.

Interview transcripts have also been organized and centered around different themes that emerged whilst summarizing them, to find out what the dominant discourses in spoken word were. This data was then summarized in the different themes of occurring discourses in Chapter 3 and analyzed using discourse analysis and the modality of ideology. As elaborated on in Chapter 3.2., discourse analysis was used to answer the above-posted research questions. Discourses are not fixed and change all the time as they are continuously created, reproduced, and changed to stay as the dominant discourse. This is also how certain discourses became apparent during this research, as they are reproduced repeatedly and appear dominant over an array of data collected. As discourse theory also analyzes what is absent, I therefore analyze if degrowth has been addressed by UNWTO in publications and interviews.

Discourses are constitutive, as they reproduce and transform the social status quo (Wodak & Meyer, 2009) but discourses are also constituted by social practices (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Both content and context of utterances are analyzed when performing a discourse analysis (Hajer, 1995; Gottweis, 2003). Discourses in general construct meaning, in one way or another, with the use of language or the lack thereof. Dryzek (2013) defines discourse analysis as “[e]ach discourse rests on assumptions, judgments, and contentions that provide the basic terms for analysis, debates, agreements, and disagreements” (p. 9). The underlying meanings of what has been said and written are essential to be uncovered using discourse analysis, focusing on ideology. Within large organizations such as the UNWTO, which can be identified as a social group (Van Dijk, 1998), there are shared ideologies and power structures at play. As Khan and MacEachen (2021) state, through discourses, specific utterances are repeatedly reproduced and are in circulation, leaving other statements purposefully out. Also, Wodak and Meyer (2009) notice that discourses reproduce the same ideologies while excluding others, which then may result in unequal power relations. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, spoken and written text is analyzed, which aims to de-mystify ideologies, according to Wodak and Meyer (2009).

Research question 2 is answered through an analysis of the ideologies that lie behind the discourses that were identified in the first step of the data analysis. The structure and linguistics used were closely examined, which aimed to reveal ideologies within discourse (Li, 2016). The modalities of ideology in chapter 3.2. have been used to identify different types of ideologies of the UNWTO that were uncovered during the discourse analysis to answer research question 1. The theoretical framework (chapter 3) provided a baseline for this analysis, by giving a deeper insight into pure ideology, blind ideology, known unknowns, ideological fantasy, and cynical ideology.

4.5. Positionality

By analyzing qualitative data, my positionality needs to be acknowledged and biases cannot be ignored. My values and beliefs, ethnicity, social class, and gender influence my worldview and personal judgment (Ateljevic, Harris, Wilson & Collins, 2005; Khan & MacEachen, 2021). I am female, and I grew up in Germany in a bicultural household with German and Dutch culture, and I have lived abroad in different countries in my late teenage years. I attended university in the Netherlands for both my bachelor and master’s studies, thereby receiving high education and being taught how to become a critical thinker. This has shaped how I see the world and how I reflect on it. I acknowledge that my worldviews are not free from Eurocentrism, as that is the dominant view that I have been confronted with growing up. Acknowledging my positionality allows me to be more reflective and conscious of how my worldview might influence my research. Every person has biases, and by realizing that research can never be value-free and without bias, we gain a deeper insight into how our research is

approached and we can better reflect on it (Bourke, 2014). Especially by analyzing discourses, how I analyze what has been said and written is shaped by my positionality. Research can never be solely objective, especially conducting discourse analysis, however by becoming aware of our positionality, we can try to reach the space in which objectivity and subjectivity meet (Bourke, 2014).

4.6. Validity and Reliability

Validity concerns whether I measured what I wanted to measure in this research (Golafshani, 2003). Both validity and reliability are rather applicable to quantitative research, instead of qualitative research. Nevertheless, in qualitative research, triangulation assists to increase validity. Therefore, by triangulation of the data collection and the inclusion of UNWTO employees from around the world, the validity of the findings could be granted, and bias minimized (Golafshani, 2003). Using data from the UNWTO e-library, YouTube videos from panel discussions, and looking at the social media accounts of the UNWTO provided an array of sources that presented the organization to analyze tourism development discourses as accurately as possible. External validity is not very applicable to qualitative social studies, as this case study presented discourses within the UNWTO, and the focus was on the UNWTO and how the interviewees speak about certain topics. Furthermore, the ideology of the organization cannot be generalized to the greater public as it is mostly bound to the social reality of one social group, namely the UNWTO.

Reliability regards the ability to repeat the same research and receive the same results, however, in a qualitative study this is not achievable. Through conducting interviews, every participant utters their own opinions and views, therefore a different selection of participants could provide different opinions (Payne & Williams, 2005). Conducting a discourse analysis and analyzing the ideology of the UNWTO entails personal interpretation of the case, based on the poststructuralist approach this thesis is embedded in. As the nature of reality of the objects cannot be examined objectively, and through second-order observation, an analysis of in this case ideology is based on my interpretation of it. However, by giving a clear outline of methodology, this research can be replicated in other case studies, to analyze discourses and the ideologies that lay behind these discourses through the conceptual framework. In addition, by comparing my findings with previous academic research, conclusions can be drawn along those lines of comparison.

4.7. Limitations

Throughout the process of writing this thesis, several limitations became apparent. First, the number of interviewees intended to be reached was not reached, which represents the difficulty of contacting people working for the UNWTO. Initially, snowball sampling was aimed to be used, which turned out not to be possible since the people I spoke to would not necessarily connect me with colleagues of theirs working for the UNWTO. Whilst some participants mentioned names I could reach out to; it did not result in a snowball effect sampling-wise. This shows that the organization, although they seem approachable from the outside, for example by accepting LinkedIn connection requests and replying to messages sent, they are generally not as approachable to interview. Furthermore, people that used to work for the UNWTO that were contacted via LinkedIn declined an interview request based on UNWTO policies.

Another limitation is the generalizability of the findings, as analyzing the ideology of an organization and the social reality in which they operate cannot be generalized, as it is very individual to the case.

The findings of ideologies within the UNWTO cannot be generalized to other tourism organizations. However, how it is analyzed using the theoretical framework including discourse and ideology theory can be applied to different cases too. Thus, whilst the findings of this case study cannot be transferred to a different case and generalized, the theoretical framework does allow it to be used in other case studies.

Chapter 5 Results

The previous chapters have provided background information on the current academic debates about sustainability, growth, and degrowth in tourism, and methodology and methods were presented. This chapter first introduces the UNWTO as a case study again, by highlighting the importance of the organization as a UN agency for tourism and being a leading organization for tourism trends and tourism policies. The theoretical framework guides the following results chapter, by presenting the tourism development discourses found in the UNWTO.

5.1. UNWTO, a brief introduction

This research has focused on the UNWTO as a case as it is the United Nations (UN) agency for tourism, and is promoting sustainable and responsible, universally accessible tourism (UNWTO, 2022c). The UN adopted tourism as part of its focus in 2003, and the UNWTO is one of the 15 specialized agencies within the UN system. All the specialized agencies have their own governing body, membership of nation-states, and regulations. The UN was founded in 1945 and since then has been an international organization providing a meeting ground to discuss global issues and find solutions together (United Nations, 2023a). The main priorities of the UN are to increase sustainability worldwide and to enhance climate action to slow down climate change (United Nations, 2023b). Alongside other UN agencies such as the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Development Programme, the UNWTO is part of the United Nations Steering Committee on Tourism for Development (SCTD) which focuses on creating a more competitive national tourism sector for developing countries and to enhance sustainable development in tourism (UNWTO, n.d.). The UNWTO is the only UN agency fully dedicated to tourism; however, the STDC involves other UN agencies in creating a more sustainable future for tourism.

The UNWTO is leading the tourism sector regarding tourism policy, trends in tourism, and expertise of the tourism sector, generating knowledge and promoting tourism as a driver for economic growth (World Tourism Organization, 2015, p. 12). All year round, the UNWTO hosts events and challenges and has appearances during UN events and other global conventions such as the COP and G20 meetings. The importance of the UNWTO in the tourism sector is apparent when looking at the number of member states, 160, and the more than 500 affiliate members that are part of the UNWTO (UNWTO, 2022b). Since 1980, every year on September 27th, the UNWTO celebrates 'World Tourism Day' together with the tourism sector, where every year is differently themed (World Tourism Organization, n.d.). The UNWTO has one Secretary General, currently, it is Zurab Pololikashvili who has been in this position since 2018, and an executive director, currently Zoritsa Urosevic. Within the organization, there are different regional departments, namely for Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East. Other departments within the UNWTO are the 'Sustainable Development Department', 'Tourism Market Intelligence and Competitiveness Department', 'Innovation, Education and Investments Department', and the 'Ethics, Culture, and Social Responsibility Department'. Within their regional and functional departments, the UNWTO sets the tone for tourism development worldwide, provides tourism education, generates market knowledge, and works on making tourism an effective tool for development (UNWTO, 2022e). In addition, the UNWTO

“promotes tourism as a driver of economic growth, inclusive development and environmental sustainability and offers leadership and support to the sector in advancing knowledge and tourism policies worldwide” (UNWTO, 2022e, p. 8).

The UNWTO publishes many different reports, accessible through their e-library, concerning Annual Reports, Tourism Highlight Reports, G20 Reports, and Tourism Barometer updates. Furthermore, there are also region-specific documents that get published frequently. In addition, UNWTO is active on social media, updating its followers on many different platforms daily. Because of the time limits of this thesis, a selection of reports has been reviewed and analyzed (see Appendix I).

Starting in the year 2000, an array of documents produced by the UNWTO have been collected and analyzed. From the beginning, these reports display highlights of the tourism industry and annual achievements, tourism is continuously presented as a positive contributor to the global economy and people worldwide, by showing the immense positive force tourism has, according to the UNWTO. The organization oftentimes features the magnitude of tourism in the global economy, being a sector where one in ten people is employed, where an emphasis is put on women’s empowerment, gender equality and the support of small and medium-sized economies. These reports furthermore point out the downsides of tourism, for example, being affected by climate change and geopolitical crises, whilst also attributing to climate change. Nonetheless, the UNWTO appears to have the answers to these problems at hand and that they are working on solutions and how to deal with these problems. The following sections provide a deeper insight into the problems and solutions identified by the UNWTO over time from 2000 to 2023.

5.2. Tourism development in the UNWTO

5.2.1. Tourism development and the social aims of UNWTO

In the documents and interviews, different themes and discourses emerged. The UNWTO emphasizes gender equality and women empowerment from the 2000s onwards, as well as the support of MSMEs from the 2010s onwards. The discourse analysis revealed several themes that combined can be considered the social discourse within tourism development in the UNWTO. First, gender equality, inclusiveness, and employment are presented, next to MSMEs and SMEs that the UNWTO focuses on within their social tourism development discourse.

Gender equality, inclusiveness, and employment

The tourism sector is seen as one of the major sectors employing women and youth, therefore, UNWTO’s focus on women empowerment and the inclusiveness of youth and local communities has been ongoing since early publications reviewed from 2000 onwards. Specifically, the UNWTO focuses on SDG5 “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (UNWTO, 2022e, p. 52), gender equality for women and empowerment, and engaging youth in tourism. The UNWTO recognizes the massive importance of the tourism sector in the global economy, which is accounting for 10% of the global GDP before the Covid-19 pandemic, women’s empowerment and the inclusion of minority groups are some of the main focal points of the UNWTO (World Tourism Organization, 2016a). The organization pays close attention to the integration of all people, stating that tourism is a sector from people to people and a tool for poverty alleviation (Priante, 2022). Specifically, the tourism sector has integrated SDG8, which focuses on “sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” (World Tourism Organization, 2016a, p. 6).

The emphasis of the UNWTO is often on the sectors' dimensions, that one in ten people worldwide is employed in tourism, showing the importance of the sector economically. Tourism is considered a driver for employment and income (Priante, 2022), therefore, continuous growth in the tourism sector has led to more employment of people, benefitting socio-economic developments (One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme, 2020). Emphasizing social justice and focusing on gender inclusion and equality is one of the main goals of the UNWTO (Soto, 2022), which can be seen in innovation challenges, wherein 27% of the projects, women are in leading positions or part of the founding teams (P5). In addition, the support of local communities to create tourism in destinations has also been one of the focal points of the UNWTO. By empowering local communities in tourism destinations, locals benefit from creating resilience (Agovino, 2022) and according to Priante (2022), the local communities must be actively involved in tourism growth. Even in times of recovery from setbacks such as the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism growth is 'enjoyed fairly' and distributed evenly across women, indigenous communities, and youth (e.g., UNWTO, 2022e). The UNWTO stresses that 54% of people employed in tourism are women. The focus of the UNWTO lies on the empowerment of those employed, as most of the micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) are central employers of women and youth (World Tourism Organization, 2021).

MSMEs (Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises)

About 80% of the tourism enterprises are MSMEs, therefore close attention is paid to their development and recovery in times of economic setbacks. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and MSMEs and their development has been a point of discussion since the 2010s, as the UNWTO stresses the importance of rural development and to become much more competitive within the tourism sector (e.g., World Tourism Organization, 2013b). Hotels have been recognized as one of the main contributors to climate change based on their fossil fuel dependency and usage, therefore, SMEs' transformation towards sustainability, energy efficiency, and energy technologies have also been highlighted (World Tourism Organization, 2011). MSMEs were shut down during the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore, their competitiveness and resilience have been the focus of the UNWTO, by spreading economic dependencies and increasing competitiveness and resilience (UNWTO, 2022e, p. 29). Furthermore, an emphasis is on developing skills for those MSMEs who would like to grow their businesses and do not know how to, the UNWTO is focusing on the education of those (P5). However, SMEs have also been recognized as agents of change toward a more sustainable future, in which economic circularity and the protection of biodiversity are in focus (UN Climate Change – Events, 2022).

5.2.2. Tourism development and the environment

In the documents reviewed and the interviews conducted, several different themes regarding tourism development and the environment emerged. The environmental discourse of tourism development in the UNWTO is comprised of the importance of the Green Economy, which had its main peak in the 2010s, the SDGs, which emerged in 2015, resilience, climate action, which has been featured since the early 2000s and the more recent theme of rethinking the future of tourism. These themes were thoroughly discussed in the data collected and are part of the sustainability and environmental discourse that is further elaborated on in the following section.

Green Economy

The UNWTO has recognized the negative consequences that tourism is contributing to, for example, climate change and biodiversity loss, and therefore the organization focuses on a greener and fairer economy within tourism (World Tourism Organization & United Nations Development Programme, 2017). The focus on the Green Economy emerged in the early 2010s and has gained increased attention throughout the years. Next to the green economy, green developments throughout the 2010s onwards have been promoted by the UNWTO. Of importance is that tourism's economic growth can be sustained whilst also creating a green tourism economy, as UNWTO utters (World Tourism Organization, 2018a; World Tourism Organization, 2021c). The green discourse has been produced for over a decade, however gaining more prominence throughout the years and especially in the past years throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Green growth and green developments are furthermore considered to need a lot of investment. However, tourism growth that is resilient and sustainable can be granted by transitioning into a greener tourism economy (World Tourism Organization, 2021c).

“We see the different examples of ongoing actions as proof of concept for the transition to a green travel and tourism economy to be recognized as the pathway for sustainable and resilient growth” (World Tourism Organization, 2021c, p. 8).

The emphasis is on making the tourism sector greener in many different aspects to enhance economic growth in tourism (World Tourism Organization, 2011, 2021c).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

From the early 2000s, when the UNWTO was involved in tourism development summits (World Tourism Organization, 2011), to 2015, when the SDGs were introduced, to 2017, the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development (World Tourism Organization, 2018a), to recent days, where sustainability is advocated to be in every part of tourism, sustainability has gained importance in tourism development. The establishment of the SDGs has been regarded as a “historic turning point” to “fix climate change” by Taleb Rifai, the former UNWTO Secretary-General (World Tourism Organization & United Nations Development Programme, 2017, p. 6). UNWTO highlights the importance of the SDGs in tourism in many publications, as the SDGs are tangible in how to work towards a more sustainable tourism sector. Since the SDGs have been formulated in 2015, a commitment has been made to work towards these goals by the UNWTO. The SDGs are considered to lead the path towards reaching the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by combating inequality, injustice, and poverty, and fixing climate change to contribute to an improvement of the planet and people (World Tourism Organization & United Nations Development Programme, 2017, p. 6).

It has been recognized that a growing tourism industry demands the sector to become more responsible regarding the 2030 Agenda (World Tourism Organization, 2017, p. 5). Priante (2022) stated, that through measurement and standards, a goal is set up and that every year, this goal is worked towards. According to Priante (2022), the 2030 Agenda is a practical example of how to transform to accomplish a global commitment. Through the SDGs, tourism can develop towards more sustainability in the tourism sector, as well as empower local communities to establish their own tourism projects through funds and economic resources to reach some of the SDGs, so Agovino (2022). The SDGs are seen to be a way to boost business operations, as sustainability can increase profit and accelerate competitiveness within the tourism sector (World Tourism Organization & United Nations

Development Programme, 2017, p. 7). Overall, the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which the goals are inherent to, are paving the “path that we all must embrace” (World Tourism Organization & United Nations Development Programme, 2017, p. 6). Since the establishment of the SDGs in 2015, their importance for UNWTO has increased even further and is recognized by the UNWTO to lead the way for a more sustainable, competitive sector in the future. Nevertheless, it has also been acknowledged that the goals are most likely not going to be reached in 2030 (Soto, 2022).

Sustainability

Throughout the documents of the UNWTO and in interviews, there is one red thread, sustainability in tourism. Sustainability is defined by the three pillars it rests on, namely the social, economic, and environmental pillars. From the late 2000s onwards, sustainability has been increasingly mentioned by the UNWTO. High priority is put on the tourism sector to become more sustainable, to grow sustainably to benefit not only local people but also the environment and businesses that become more competitive by developing sustainably and including the SDGs (World Tourism Organization & United Nations Development Programme, 2017). Therefore, the discourse of sustainability in tourism is one of the most dominant ones in UNWTO documents. This is co-constructed through the creation and adoption of the SDGs by governments all over the globe, as the year 2015 was marked a year of transformation, a “landmark year” (World Tourism Organization, 2016a, p. 38), to move towards a more sustainable future within the tourism sector. The potential to promote sustainable tourism conjointly by creating jobs and endorsing cultural exchange by developing and implementing policies has been highlighted by the UNWTO (World Tourism Organization 2016a, p. 6). Sustainability is seen as the way to go and move forward (Soto, 2022), not only focusing on one pillar but to find an equilibrium (Priante, 2022), creating tourism that can be better, and more inclusive and lead to more economic growth through sustainability measures.

Sustainability and promoting growth can also be observed in further publications. 2017 has been described as a year of uninterrupted growth and has been a record year for tourism (World Tourism Organization, 2018a, p. 10), at the same time as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, to display the “transformative contribution to the development agenda” (World Tourism Organization, 2018a, p. 5). It has been recognized that the whole tourism sector should adapt sustainability guidelines through and through and move away from it being a niche form of tourism (World Tourism Organization, 2021c). Sustainability in tourism furthermore has an exceptional value accredited as side branches of the UNWTO were established that specifically regard sustainable tourism development, such as the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme that produced a 10-Year Framework of Sustainable Tourism Programme (10YFP STP). Those programs focus on sustainability in tourism development for a more competitive and responsible sector.

Resilience

In tandem with sustainability is resilience, which is used to make the tourism industry stronger and to prevent huge damage from future shocks. Since tourism has faced setbacks and standstills before, resilience has emerged since 2010 in the documents reviewed. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought increased attention towards creating a more resilient tourism sector again, because with stronger resilience, the tourism sector does not get hit as hard, and with that prevents major setbacks in economic growth, according to the UNWTO. Being resilient entails the sector's capacity to decrease carbon emissions by half by 2030 and transform into a more sustainable sector, according to Priante

(2022) and UNWTO (2022e). Climate action is one of the main points to create more resilient tourism, as tourism is recognized to be one of the most vulnerable sectors regarding climate change, but also a contributor to it (UNWTO, 2022e). Furthermore, through resilience, a better future is created that benefits people all over the world, according to the UNWTO (2022e). In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic has shown how crucial it is to have local supply chains in place, and the importance thereof, to create a more circular economy and be less dependent on outside sources (One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme, 2020, p. 10). By having a more efficient value chain in tourism, a more “sustainable and resilient growth pathway” (One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme, 2020, p. 10) can be achieved according to the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme. Not only is the UNWTO focused on achieving a more resilient sector by promoting climate action and circularity in tourism destinations, but another focus is also on increasing the amount of Affiliate Members and engaging more with the private sector to “grow back stronger and be more resilient” (UNWTO, 2022e, p. 43).

Rethinking the future of tourism

Because of the setbacks of the Covid-19 pandemic and the recovery thereof have initiated the theme of World Tourism Day 2022 celebrated in Bali, namely “Rethinking Tourism” (UNWTO, 2022e). As already mentioned, WTD (World Tourism Day) is celebrated all over the world by the tourism sector on September 27th. Due to the challenges tourism faces caused by the pandemic outbreak and the consequences of mobilities ending, the UNWTO has been rethinking the tourism sector. This rethinking by the UNWTO includes putting people, ecosystems, and nature first (Soto, 2022), as well as the social inclusion of everyone, and gender equality to develop more sustainably in the future (Agovino, 2022; UNWTO, 2022e). Tourism is regarded to as the backbone of social prosperity as it provides an opportunity for people employed and involved in the tourism industry to flourish, therefore it is important to include mainstream tourism in the global agenda (UNWTO, 2022e, p. 9). It has been recognized by the UNWTO that the pandemic has offered the chance to critically look back and examine how the tourism sector can move forward post-pandemic. A common consensus of the UNWTO for rethinking tourism is to transform the sector to become more resilient, sustainable, and responsible (UNWTO, 2022e). Furthermore, it has been elaborated that rethinking entails to be case specific and considering what the individual cases need to move forward (Noakes, 2022; Agovino, 2022). Overall, not only rethinking but also acting is required to transform the tourism sector, which is also dependent on financing (UNWTO, 2022f, p. 4). Through economic support, inclusive and sustainable tourism growth can be achieved within the tourism sector, as the UNWTO presents,

“[t]ourism can only deliver on its unique power to provide opportunity and drive sustainable and inclusive growth if it is given practical and economic support. The future starts now” (UNWTO, 2022e, p. 58).

This growth is also necessary, as a growing global population demands an increase in jobs and growth in the tourism sector according to the UNWTO (2022f, p. 4).

Climate action

Since early 2000, the UNWTO has been concerned with climate change and the possible effects it can have on tourism. In 2003, the first international conference on climate change and tourism took place in Djerba, showing the concerns (World Tourism Organization, 2010). Throughout the years, not only concerns about climate change but also climate action has become more dominant in UNWTO

publications. In line with rethinking the future of tourism and climate action, as well as sustainability is the topic of the Glasgow Declaration. The Glasgow Declaration was created during COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, which targets tourism organizations and businesses to engage in climate action plans and commit to and implement these (One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme, 2021). Overall, the Glasgow Declaration has been perceived as a great achievement (Priante, 2022) and as a milestone for the tourism sector, as sustainable tourism has been addressed for the first time during a COP (Soto, 2022). Climate action is a commitment through signing the Glasgow Declaration, according to the interviewees, which is of high priority to create a more sustainable tourism sector. Whilst some interviewees acknowledge, that the Glasgow Declaration is a great achievement and not just a signature but also a commitment (Priante, 2022), and that momentum is gained as it applied more pressure to talk about sustainability (Soto, 2022), others emphasized that more should be done as we do not have time to waste for climate action (e.g., Soto, 2022; Agovino, 2022; UN Climate Change – Events, 2022).

The UNWTO says that they are taking steps towards climate action and advocate sustainability and rethinking the sector all over their publications during post Covid-19 pandemic. Presenting the Glasgow Declaration and being proud of the 700 signatories, calling it a “milestone” (Soto, 2022) and an “achievement” (Priante, 2022) is not enough, and more action is required according to the interviewees, Soto (2022), and Agovino (2022). The UNWTO presented the Glasgow Declaration as a commitment to taking a more sustainable pathway in tourism. When asked in interviews if the participants have already seen actual changes being made, the answer is mostly very general, that “everything is going into the right direction” (Priante, 2022). Another interviewee mentioned that “that’s a good starting point, but we should do more that’s my opinion” (Agovino, 2022).

For tourism to recover and provide sustainable growth, interviewees emphasize that climate action must take place, as it is recognized that tourism is contributing to climate change but also exposed to the changing climate, which makes climate action even more crucial for tourism (e.g., Priante, 2022). The Glasgow Declaration is regarded as a “historic deal” (UNWTO, 2022e, p. 49) by Zurab Pololikashvili, UNWTO Secretary-General, as it provokes change based on the four pillars it rests on, which are to “measure, decarbonize, regenerate and unlock innovative financing” (UNWTO, 2022e, p. 49; Priante, 2022).

5.3. No limits to growth, the hegemony of the growth discourse

Throughout the discourse analysis, several discourses became apparent, namely the social discourse and the environmental discourse. Within these two dominant discourses, one discourse prevailed throughout, which is tourism growth. The UNWTO does not consider that there are limits to tourism growth, as it is not only the status quo but also regarded as positive and desirable for the tourism sector. Through the different themes that emerged within the discourse analysis, tourism growth utterances are interwoven throughout.

5.3.1. Growth as status quo

According to the UNWTO, tourism has experienced steady growth throughout the years since the early 2010s, which is comparable to the growth of tourism in the 1960s (World Tourism Organization, 2017). Even in times of socioeconomic emergencies, geopolitical instability, and health crises, the tourism industry was never on hold for long. Tourism has been considered one of the most outstanding

sensations regarding economic and social developments by the UNWTO (World Tourism Organization, 2000). Throughout the years, every year has shown an increase in tourism figures compared to the year before. Therefore, tourism has been acknowledged as a great opportunity for development and transformation all over the world (World Tourism Organization, 2013b). Not only did the tourism industry expand and grow every year, but it also grew above average most years. This growth has led to more economic prosperity, an increase in employment, empowerment of women and youth, and a tool for development, according to the UNWTO.

5.3.2. Green growth

By introducing the SDGs and creating more awareness about sustainability and climate change contributors, the discourse has shifted slightly from solely highlighting the benefits of growth to more consciousness of tourism as a contributor to climate change and environmental degradation. It has been recognized that tourism cannot continue along the business-as-usual path and that tourism increases pressure on the environment (World Tourism Organization, 2016b). The emphasis is on sustainability conjointly with green tourism growth as being crucial for tourism development, to continue to empower local communities, support MSMEs, and ensure the sector's long-term growth (World Tourism Organization, 2016b). Resilience has become more important for the tourism sector due to the several crises it faces that have led to instability and setbacks in economic growth. For the tourism sector to further grow and develop, resilience is key, however, the focus lies not on the resilience of the sector in general, but on the resilience of the tourism growth pathway. Green developments and green growth are emphasized in UNWTO publications, linking 'green' to technologies, investments, and economic growth (UNWTO, 2022e). It has furthermore been stated to decarbonize the world via tourism and to employ greener strategies for tourism (UNWTO, 2022e).

5.3.3. Good growth

This growth has led to overtourism in some places, which has negative consequences for the local population, the destination, and the environment, as argued by scholars. However, as the UNWTO recognized, overtourism is not a nemesis, and more attention should be paid towards how to manage overtourism (World Tourism Organization, 2018a), as it has been regarded as a lack of management and programming (Priante, 2022). Overtourism is not considered to be the enemy by the UNWTO (2018a), however, at the same time, it has been addressed that growth in the tourism sector presents an array of challenges, such as natural resource consumption, impact on climate change, and carrying capacities of destinations (One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme, 2020). Nevertheless, these challenges are quickly overshadowed by the benefits that tourism growth provides for the industry.

5.3.4. Grow back – growth after crises

Covid-19 put an end to this ever-increasing growth, at least for some time, as global travel came to a standstill. This has provided the opportunity for the UNWTO to rethink tourism, to critically reflect on tourism practices from the past, to reconsider how tourism could be changed to have a smaller impact on the environment and to fulfill the 2030 Agenda. Due to a halt in tourism activities, none to only an exceedingly small amount of revenue was achieved, which challenged tourism businesses. As a result, the UNWTO regards the fast recovery of the tourism sector and the resilience of growth as incredibly important for tourism to prosper again. Rethinking tourism however means to critically examine how the tourism sector can move forward post-pandemic, which is through becoming more resilient, sustainable, and responsible to further reach tourism numbers pre-pandemic as fast as possible,

according to the UNWTO. In the most recent publications, an emphasis was put on how much tourism has grown back again since 2019, and that three years after the pandemic initially hit, a strong year for tourism can be expected (UNWTO, 2023).

This shows whilst there is a discourse of sustainability as the way to develop tourism, the growth, and business-as-usual discourse is still dominant and with that challenges every aspect that tries to focus on sustainability. In addition, sustainability and the SDGs are seen as business opportunities to become more competitive, which is equal to an increase of economic incentives leading to more growth in the tourism sector. The sustainability discourse is coupled with the growth discourse, as growth is constantly legitimized by linking it to sustainable development, following the 2030 Agenda and tourism as a tool for inclusiveness, gender equality, employment, and economic prosperity. It appears as if growth cannot be questioned based on all the benefits that come with it. At the same time, the UNWTO is aware of the negative effects of tourism growth, nonetheless, mostly not a lot of attention is paid to those.

The following figure (Figure 2) illustrates the dominant discourses within the UNWTO.

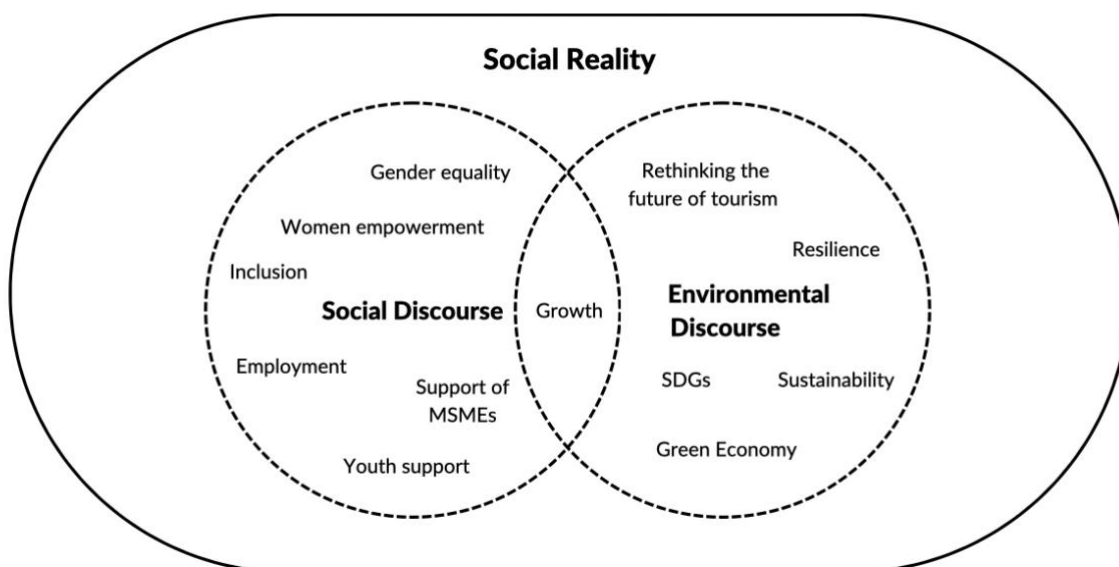


Figure 2 Discourse analysis findings

5.3.5. The big absence: degrowth in the UNWTO tourism development discourse

Tourism growth appears as the main discourse of tourism development in the UNWTO, which remains unchallenged and dominant as a discourse. By not only reproducing growth in one way or another, but also by legitimizing growth through sustainability, the SDGs, and others as presented in the discourse analysis, tourism growth is dominant. Meanwhile, degrowth has not been addressed in any of the collected publications of the UNWTO, whereas degrowth has been widely discussed in tourism literature (see chapter 2). Thus, to find out whether degrowth is discussed in the UNWTO at all, questions about it were asked during interviews. The responses were twofold, degrowth is endorsed by two interviewees, whilst one acknowledged it to be a concept for spoiled destinations, another did not address degrowth at all. One participant stated that degrowth within the UNWTO does not have a space to be addressed and further explored, as tourism was identified to be a horizontal sector that is linked to many other aspects, as the findings show. Contrary to that, some interviewees recognized

that degrowth should be implemented in our daily lives. However, it was also indicated that degrowth is a concept for destinations that have their physiological and safety needs covered and can therefore focus on less crucial aspects of life, such as tourism. Destinations that are still developing are encouraged to find a balance between economic growth and understanding the consequences of rapid growth and human impact on destinations (e.g., Noakes, 2022).

Interestingly, degrowth has been acknowledged as the way to develop by two of the interviewees, that were convinced that every aspect of life should degrow, however, they also acknowledged the difficulties of striving towards degrowth. The consensus that there is no space to discuss degrowth within the UNWTO explains the lack of degrowth literature in UNWTO publications. In addition, one interviewee reproduced what has been stated in the World Tourism Day Report 2022 regarding the degrowth question, acknowledging that

“[t]ourism emerged out of crisis at a crossroad. If it is to realize its full potential to drive sustainable and inclusive development while also fulfilling its climate action responsibilities, the sector cannot continue along the same, pre-pandemic path. UNWTO emphasizes the vital importance of rethinking and transforming tourism through a whole-government approach, alongside enhanced public and private partnerships” (Priante, 2022).

To compare the answers, the report states

*“**Tourism Transformed.** Tourism emerged out of crisis at a crossroad. If it is to realize its full potential to drive sustainable and inclusive development while also fulfilling its climate action responsibilities, the sector cannot continue along the same, pre-pandemic path. UNWTO emphasizes the vital importance of rethinking and transforming tourism. [...] Looking ahead, UNWTO emphasizes the importance of whole-government approaches to tourism reform, alongside enhanced public and private partnerships. Tourism can only deliver on its unique power to provide opportunity and drive sustainable and inclusive growth if it is given practical and economic support” (UNWTO, 2022e, p. 58).*

This example shows that the answers of officials within the UNWTO do not diverge much from publications of the organization and that it is undisputed that the tourism sector needs to develop sustainably and inclusively. Degrowth remains absent within the discourses of rethinking tourism, as the focus remains sustainable and inclusive growth.

To conclude, two main discourses are at play within the UNWTO, the social discourse of tourism development and the environmental discourse of tourism development. Within these two discourses, the tourism growth discourse is also interwoven and predominant, since it is the common thread that runs through UNWTO data and utterances.

Chapter 6 Analysis: Ideologies in the UNWTO Tourism Development Discourses

The results in chapter 5 have shown that within the UNWTO, there are two constants regarding tourism development discourses, namely the sustainability discourse and the growth discourse of the organization. Throughout the documents, the notion of sustainability acts as an empty signifier that is adjustable to the specific situations to suit them then, as has been identified by scholars before (Sharpley, 2000; Butler, 2018; Brown, 2016). As an empty signifier, sustainability has been used to adjust to the current trends globally and transfer them to tourism. Examples are the emphasis on green growth, then resilience in tourism, and recently the rethinking tourism debates within the UNWTO, all in the name of sustainable development of tourism. At the same time, the constant in these developments is the presence of tourism growth that legitimizes the growth agenda of the UNWTO, in the way in which they operate and are reproduced, emphasizing the ideology that lies behind the tourism discourses.

The following section gives more insights into the ideologies of the UNWTO based on data collection and discourse analysis results that have been presented in the previous chapter. This analysis provides more exhaustive examples to further show the ideologies of the UNWTO in more detail. It is important to state that the discourses present in UNWTO documents and interviews can be interpreted in different ways. The discourses of the interviews and data of the reports collected show different forms of ideology of the organization and people that work at UNWTO. To expand our understanding of how the different sustainable and social discourses are part of the constant growth discourses that to some extent are incompatible but discursively rendered themselves to be coherent, four forms of ideology that were identified in the theoretical framework (chapter 3) will be used. These forms of ideology are pure ideology, blind ideology including unknown knowns, ideological fantasy, and cynical ideology. How it is spoken and written about certain topics such as sustainability and sustainable tourism development, growth, and degrowth, the underlying ideologies of UNWTOs social reality become more apparent. Several different points show the different types of ideologies that either maintain, reproduce, or may undermine the UNWTO growth discourse, which is focused on in the following sections.

6.1. The pure ideology of UNWTO

Pure ideology as applied by Žižek entails that beliefs and values are underlying our social reality and that it is not contested, as we do not know what reality is at its core, and therefore the social reality that we live in is taken for granted. For example, the UNWTO frames tourism as becoming more sustainable and striving towards sustainable growth. With that, they legitimize the growth agenda, since the organization frames it as sustainable growth, not just growth in general. The statement of Taleb Rifai, UNWTO Secretary-General (until 2018) about the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development gives a clear indication of this growth ideology. By stating, that the “exponential growth of our sector provides tremendous hope that our sector will remain one that has a truly positive change in the world” (World Tourism Organization, 2017, p. 5), the pure ideology of the UNWTO becomes apparent. This statement clearly shows that Rifai is convinced about the positive effect of exponential growth on positive change in the world. At the same time, by stating that growth leads to positive change in the world, the growth agenda of the UNWTO is legitimized.

As elaborated in the discourse analysis, the UNWTO regarded the establishment of the SDGs as a critical time to turn things around and change the tourism sector, which highlights the pure ideology of the organization and its ideology of growth. Though sustainability within tourism is important for the UNWTO, it is used to legitimize growth and maintain the growth ideology this way. Thus, even though to some extent, the dominant discourse regards tourism sustainability and environmental concerns, the ideology of the organization is embedded in the social reality of striving towards more growth within the tourism industry which is rooted in the pure ideology of tourism growth. Convincingly arguing that the tourism sector has a positive impact globally shows that the social reality of the UNWTO is structured by underlying beliefs that remain uncontested and taken for granted.

The organization's ideology is affirmed by the notion of degrowth remaining absent in the UNWTO. Though employees of the UNWTO are aware of degrowth, the concept does not render throughout publications, and with that presents the only reality that the UNWTO knows and wants to retain within their social reality. By leaving something out that does not go in accord with its social reality, the organization's own reality is constantly reproduced and rendered as normal and uncontested, which shows ideology at its purest.

6.2. Blind ideology: status quo is the way to go

By having a blind ideology, the object is not aware of having it, but still, is doing what its ideology entails. For example, one of the most recent tourism barometer publications of the UNWTO shows the blind ideology within the organization. Here, it is uttered that tourism numbers are close to pre-pandemic levels and that this recovery of tourism is looked at with a lot of optimism, as uttered in the statement by Zurab Pololikashvili, UNWTO Secretary-General (UNWTO, 2023, p. 1).

“A new year brings more reason for optimism for global tourism. UNWTO anticipates a strong year for the sector even in the face of diverse challenges including the economic situation and continued geopolitical uncertainty. Economic factors may influence how people travel in 2023 and UNWTO expects demand for domestic and regional travel to remain strong and help drive the sector’s wider recovery” UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili (UNWTO, 2023, p. 1).

In the statement, it becomes clear that the focus of the organization is to transform back to the status quo as soon as possible, even in times of uncertainty due to geopolitical circumstances. The growth ideology of the organization is enhanced by the discourse of sustainability, as it portrays how the term is used to promote more growth in the tourism sector, as the discourse analysis has revealed. Sustainability is used as an empty signifier to fit the needs of the current situation and to adjust it to legitimize further tourism growth. According to the World Tourism Organization (2016b, p. 2), sustainability and growth are often named together and therefore go hand in hand.

Like blind ideology, “they do not know it, but they still do it”, unknown knowns concern the premise that there is something that we unknowingly know, thus something that we know but we are not even aware that we know it. The growth ideology can also be described as an unknown known, as something that we are not aware of but is inherent in how we operate (Žižek, 2008b). Based on the capitalist system we live in, we are used to consuming more and striving for more and therefore we need growth, to sustain this way of living. It is inherent in our nature that we want to have more and live in an abundance of goods and things. Therefore, it is not surprising that getting back to the status quo of

the UNWTO is dominant in their publications during the Covid-19 pandemic. In times of crisis, and shortly after, the UNWTO is more focused on the increase of tourism numbers, rather than standing still for a moment and critically thinking about the goals and wants that they, as the UN agency for tourism, have. This is again based on the unknown knows that Žižek (2006) describes, as growth has been the only reality that we know up until now, even as alternative pathways to growth become more advocated and more discussed, such as the degrowth debate amongst academics.

6.3. Sustainable growth as ideological fantasy

Ideological fantasy as described by Žižek is about the social reality of an object that is guided by an illusion, meaning that we are aware of something that is behind this illusion, however, we hold on to that illusion and pursue the path of it (Žižek, 2008a). An example of the ideological fantasy of the UNWTO is the theme of World Tourism Day 2022 celebrated in Bali, Indonesia. It puts rethinking the future of tourism into focus, however, at the same time, it also promotes tourism to destinations such as Bali, which has been highly affected by overtourism in the past few years before the Covid-19 pandemic. By stating that “tourism return[s] to sustainable growth” (UNWTO, 2022e, p. 21), the illusion that tourism development was sustainable before the pandemic is kept alive, however, the organization chooses to disregard that sustainable tourism on a global scale did not take place at all, as scholars argue. Taking the example of Žižek (2008a, p. 30), they know that their idea of sustainable growth is masking a particular form of natural resource exploitation and contribution to climate change. The growth that is advocated by the UNWTO cannot be sustainable in terms of pre-Covid-19 pandemic levels, because tourism growth was not sustainable previously either, according to academia.

Exceeding planetary boundaries and having an enormous impact on climate change, the UNWTO misrecognizes the illusion that is structuring their reality and the tourism agenda (e.g., Žižek, 2008a). Based on the discourse analysis, it becomes clear that the UNWTO is aware of the contribution of tourism to climate change and therefore advocates climate action, however, the motive is tourism growth, knowingly or unknowingly. In addition, utterances by Zoritsa Urosevic, such as that the Covid-19 pandemic has presented a “window of opportunity to rethink and reform our sector” (UN Climate Change – Events, 2022) and that the window is now closing shows that they were aware of the pandemic providing the opportunity to structure tourism differently, but that the time in which that could have taken place has passed. They are led by the illusion that is shaping their social reality, which is potentially undermining the intention of tourism growth as being hegemonic.

6.4. Cynical ideology to uphold the hegemonic discourse of tourism growth

As already explained in chapter 3, cynical ideology can be described as something that the cynical subject is ‘aware of what they are doing, but they are still doing it’, insisting on the ideological mask (Žižek, 2008a). By stating that tourism has the power to stimulate inclusive and sustainable growth, the cynical ideology of the organization can be seen. The UNWTO is aware of times of crisis and what effects it has globally, however, the focus is still on growth within the sector. Utterances by different UNWTO officials include that with tourism growth comes a responsibility to manage it which may indicate that the officials are concerned about how the tourism industry is developing. In 2016, it has been stated that “[n]o longer can we treat a business-as-usual path in tourism development” (World Tourism Organization, 2016b, p. 2), as growth in tourism leads to more pressure on the climate and challenges the carrying capacities of destinations (World Tourism Organization, 2016b, p. 2). This example indicates the cynical ideology of the UNWTO because they are knowledgeable of tourism’s

negative impact on the environment, but still, promote growth by using sustainability as a term to justify their continuous focus on growth.

Even in times of crisis, the UNWTO still advocates tourism growth, highlighting another example of their cynical ideology. The UNWTO recognizes that tourism causes climate change, and is therefore advocating climate action (2022e), whilst also supporting collaboration to reach common goals such as the SDGs (UN Climate Change – Events, 2022). At the same time, the organization acknowledges that tourism is highly vulnerable to climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, and therefore, tourism activities are at risk due to the changing climate, according to the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme (2021). Interwoven into this discourse is the notion of tourism growth throughout recent reports (UNWTO, 2023, p. 1), showing that they are aware of the falsehood of their actions and are aware of what interest is hidden behind it (Žižek, 2008a, p. 25).

Rethinking tourism is another example of cynical ideology as the UNWTO is very aware that the tourism sector cannot be rethought after one crisis because economic gains and reaching the status quo again are more important. Furthermore, the discourse analysis revealed that the Glasgow Declaration is perceived as a great achievement because of showing the commitment to climate action by signing it (Priante, 2022). This is also an example of cynical ideology, as one is aware that a signatory to something does not mean a lot if no action is followed. As Žižek (2008a) puts it “[t]he cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but [s/]he none the less still insists upon the mask” (p. 25). In other words, in this example, the interviewee is aware of the illusion that the signatures stand for commitment and already knows that it is not achievable. Similar to the Glasgow Declaration utterances is the attention to the SDGs, which have been regarded as a historic turning point to move into a more sustainable direction, whilst at the same time being very aware that the 2030 Agenda will not be met (Soto, 2022). In addition, stating that “everything is going into the right direction” (Priante, 2022), it becomes apparent that the interviewee’s illusion is structuring her social reality. Though the UNWTO promotes rethinking tourism and increasingly advocates for climate action, the underlying focus is to get tourism back to the status quo pre-Covid-19 pandemic.

When asked about degrowth, two of the interviewees stated that degrowth should be implemented in all aspects of life and that we should strive towards it, however, at the same time, one interviewee acknowledged that the UNWTO is not speaking about it at all. This has also been found in the discourse analysis of the documents, as degrowth was not mentioned once. However, this shows the cynical ideology of the organization, as employees are very much aware of the concept of degrowth, nevertheless they are still reproducing the business-as-usual discourse and striving towards the status quo after the Covid-19 pandemic, which is continuous growth. Additionally, one interviewee mentioned that within the UNWTO system, there is no place to talk about degrowth and that there is an emphasis on how tourism can recover and grow more responsibly. This confirms that the organization is not considering evolving in a different way but growth and that the system that the UNWTO operates within is stoic and does not allow changes to happen.

6.5. Conclusion of analysis

The different modes of ideology present how the social reality of the UNWTO is constructed, and how certain tourism development discourses are constantly reproduced, how they are altered and changed throughout. Whilst pure ideology and blind ideology potentially undermine the dominant tourism

development discourse of the UNWTO, ideological fantasy, and cynical ideology maintain the growth discourse. What keeps these discourses stable is the beginning of their end, namely that whilst ideology can function as strengthening the growth discourse, ideology can also act as undermining the growth discourse. It seems that the pure and blind ideology of the UNWTO constitutes the discourses of tourism being truly sustainable and that there is a bright future for tourism, as better knowledge is lacking through the values and beliefs that structure the social reality. The social reality in which the UNWTO operates is not contested.

Contrarily, within the ideological fantasy and cynical ideology, we are aware of the ideologies that structure our social reality; however, we pretend that we do not know to reproduce discourses within that ideology. Either our social reality is structured by an illusional fantasy, or ideologies are cynical in the way that we exactly know what we are doing but we are doing it, nonetheless. By upholding the cynical ideology of promoting tourism growth in connection with knowing that tourism has a negative influence on the environment and global climate change, the hegemony of the UNWTO becomes clear. The dominant discourse remains tourism growth and is also the dominant group ideology that prevails within the UNWTO. Ideological fantasy and cynical ideology maintain the discourse of tourism growth as dominant and hegemonic. The UNWTO is aware of its growth agenda despite utterances about sustainability and rethinking the future of tourism, which might enforce to undermine the growth discourse. These statements and actions are used to show their concern for the tourism sector's future and legitimize the organization's intrinsic growth agenda.

This thesis has studied the dominant tourism development discourses in the UNWTO that seemingly changed throughout the years, but the core of these discourses stays the same, as the ideology of the organization has not changed throughout. The claim that the status quo is the way to go for the UNWTO can be agreed with, as the growth ideology protects the dominant discourse. Finally, the dominant growth discourse is reproduced through the different modes of ideology that legitimize the status quo.

Chapter 7 Conclusion and Discussion

7.1. Conclusion

Through conducting a discourse analysis on tourism development discourses and examining these discourses to uncover the ideologies that lay behind them, several findings were made that help to answer the research questions which are RQ1 *'Which discourses about tourism development are present in the UNWTO?'*; SRQ1 *'How did the discourses in the UNWTO evolve over time?'* and RQ2 *'What are the main ideologies that are present within the UNWTO?'*

In my research, dominant tourism development discourses present within the UNWTO became apparent. The social discourse is constructed through themes of gender equality, women empowerment, employment of women and youth, and support of MSMEs. The environmental discourse was uttered through sustainable tourism development, SDGs, rethinking the future of tourism, and climate action, as illustrated in figure 2. Besides these two discourses, sustainability and the tourism growth discourse are interwoven within the utterances of the UNWTO. The dominant ideology that lies behind the tourism development discourses is the ideology of growth and returning to the status quo as soon as possible after the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the differing discourses about sustainability and tourism growth have revealed the growth ideology of the organization. Though the UNWTO states to be aware of climate change, environmental degradation, and tourism as a climate-sensitive industry, the main ideology is growth in the tourism sector.

Data was collected that was published from 2000-2023, and within this timeframe, different discourses have evolved. Whilst sustainability and climate action have been discussed from the early 2000s onwards and increased throughout the past two decades, other themes have emerged later, such as the SDGs in 2015 for example, which concerned the commitment to following the SDGs and the increased importance of climate action. Both the green economy and resilience emerged in the early 2010s, and whilst resilience in tourism prevailed within UNWTO publications, the green economy theme shifted towards green development throughout the 2010s. Nowadays, an emphasis is on the green transformation of the tourism sector from the UNWTO standpoint. The social discourse has also prevailed throughout time, however, in recent years more emphasis is put on women's empowerment and gender equality. Especially in the discourse of rethinking the tourism sector, which has just recently emerged, women and youth are put on the center stage of transformation.

Simultaneously to the emergence of these discourses, tourism growth is stated throughout the publications, promoting continuous growth, and highlighting that one year after another, tourism exceeded expectations and growth predictions. Whereas discourses about sustainability and protecting the environment become more apparent, discourses about striving towards business-as-usual are reoccurring as well. In more recent days, the UNWTO calls for change that is wanted and needed to transform tourism to become more sustainable and to move away from pre-pandemic pathways (UNWTO, 2022e, p. 58). At the same time, tourism's status quo and tourism growth are desired to be achieved, based on discourses in the documents and interviews. What has been left out in UNWTO publications is the notion of degrowth of the tourism sector, which tourism scholars focus on. Whilst employees of the UNWTO are familiar with degrowth and emphasize its importance for development in the future to come, the UNWTO itself does not provide a space to discuss degrowth in tourism based on the findings.

The discourse analysis that answered the secondary research question reveals discourses that enable closer insight into the underlying ideologies analyzed in chapter 5.4. The growth ideology of the organization is predominant, which represents the hegemony of the UNWTO in the tourism sector regarding tourism growth. The cynical ideology of the organization remains dominant, as it is very well known that the tourism sector cannot continue along the pre-pandemic growth path, highlighting the importance of climate action but at the same time, tourism growth is advocated. By using words such as 'green' and sustainability to legitimize economic growth, the organization 'is aware of what they are doing but they are still doing it'. As a result, change in their ideology is less likely to happen as its ideology sustains the growth discourse through showing that growth is so deeply ingrained in the social reality of the UNWTO.

To conclude from the results and analysis, different themes, and discourses regarding tourism development in the UNWTO emerge in the chosen timeframe. Whilst some discourses become more dominant, for example, sustainability, SDGs, and resilience, others change, such as the green economy towards green growth. The discourses are reproduced, and change over time, however, one aspect stays the same, the ideology of tourism growth. The dominant ideology serves to legitimate the growth agenda of the UNWTO, which is producing and reproducing the discourses of tourism growth within the discourses of social inclusion and environmental awareness in tourism development.

7.2. Discussion

The results offer a more in-depth analysis of tourism development discourses in the UNWTO and the ideology of the organization, which has been depicted by four main types of ideology. Through analyzing the discourses and ideologies more detailed, the findings are further discussed with existing literature that I reviewed in chapter 2. Regarding the overall growth discourse that has been produced by the UNWTO, the findings of this thesis support the criticism of scholars regarding the UNWTO growth agenda. Many utterances can underline that the UNWTO focused on the growth of the tourism industry for decades now. As findings show, in times of crisis or in times of peace and stability, the dominant discourse of tourism development is tourism growth. This discourse is uttered by describing how tourism growth provides the opportunity to prosper economically, as well as to steer development and transformation. Whether the UNWTO discusses inclusiveness and gender equality or women empowerment, resilience, sustainability, rethinking tourism, and the SDGs, the objective of tourism growth is present throughout.

Many different examples from the documents collected exemplify that going back to the status quo is what the organization is promoting and what they are trying to reach. The growth agenda has been the most dominant throughout the years, as the results present. It appears that the UNWTO is promoting getting back to the status quo as soon as possible. For example, by stating that there is much hope for this year to reach pre-pandemic levels again, the UNWTO underlines this dominant discourse of tourism growth.

7.2.1. Sustainability to legitimize tourism growth

Conforming to what was argued by Fletcher (2011) already, the findings show that the discourse of sustainable tourism is a key one in the global tourism industry and the UNWTO because it legitimizes the capitalist growth of the sector according to the scholar. As the findings show, the UNWTO promotes and puts an emphasis on sustainability in tourism and following the sustainable development agenda for 2030, continuous growth is legitimized. This finding is in accordance with

what Saarinen (2020) has found, that striving towards sustainable growth still roots in and is sustaining growth, which is unsustainable, according to the scholar. The ideological fantasy of tourism sustainability is masking the status quo actions of the UNWTO, which agrees with what Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) has stated as well, that sustainability is often used to mask business-as-usual and economic gains. Furthermore, the findings have shown that part of the ideology of the UNWTO entails that sustainable tourism growth and getting back to the status quo is the way to go and that the UNWTO profoundly believes in a sustainable future for tourism. Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) however argues that sustained growth may be the opposite of sustainability, as growth on our planet with finite resources is simply impossible and the principle of unsustainability. As Hall and Wood (2021) state, only by decoupling from natural capital and minimizing production and consumption, also argued as being degrowth, and sustainability in tourism can take place, this is however not addressed in this dimension by the UNWTO. The findings furthermore show that the UNWTO regards sustainable development and sustainable growth simultaneously, once again showing that its growth ideology is taken for granted.

The path that the tourism sector has gone thus far has always been focused on growth and more travel all over the world, as the results show. Therefore, this growth ideology is deeply ingrained in the organization and in the way they utter themselves. By introducing the discourse of rethinking tourism and sustainable growth, the UNWTO appears to move along with the global sustainability wave, however, their growth ideology does not allow these utterances to transform into action. Rethinking tourism from the UNWTO perspective entails supporting communities and local tourism enterprises, which has also been identified by Higgins-Desbiolles and colleagues (2019). They argue that tourism must be redesigned so that local people can benefit from tourism, and emphasize sustainable degrowth. This is also in line with what Fletcher et al. (2021) have explored, that rethinking the tourism sector entails a fundamental shift toward how we think about traveling. As Fletcher et al. (2021) argue, from a degrowth standpoint we must challenge the neoliberal way of living, regarding for example length of stay and mode of travel. Contrary to that, findings have shown that the leading tourism organization setting the tone for tourism development is promoting getting back to the status quo, for example, highlighting that tourism is changing back to pre-pandemic tourism numbers. This agrees with what Fletcher (2011) found, that tourism is thriving through growth and is on an increasing trajectory.

Findings have shown that the leading tourism organization, UNWTO, is steered by the growth ideology to go back to business-as-usual as soon as possible after being hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. Whereas interview results show that the tourism sector is seen as an industry from people for people (Priante, 2022), other findings have shown that the number of affiliate members of the UNWTO is seeking to be increased to “grow back stronger and be more resilient” (UNWTO, 2022e, p. 43). This finding is in accordance with what Gascón (2019) and Higgins-Desbiolles (2022) have argued, that the UNWTO is an organization that focuses on the interests of the affiliate members and is considered of being a profit-oriented industry by Gascón (2019). By stating to increase the number of affiliate members, the UNWTO utterance conforms to what has been stated by Higgins-Desbiolles before, that the UNWTO is an “an agent of the tourism industry” (2022, p. 3).

7.2.2. Climate action and rethinking tourism to maintain the status quo

Utterances by different UNWTO officials that with tourism growth comes a responsibility to manage it, and that they are committed to following the Sustainable Development Agenda, may indicate that

the officials are concerned about how the tourism industry is developing. In addition, all the events and protocols about climate action, the Glasgow Declaration, and rethinking tourism are discursive practices that are constructed by the UNWTO to highlight their climate awareness and to legitimize themselves in times of climate emergency, however at the same time growth discourses are dominant. Furthermore, challenges in tourism are not seen as a problem but rather as an opportunity, as stated “[o]ver-Tourism: growth is not the enemy, it is how we manage it” (World Tourism Organization, 2018a, p. 34). The pro-growth tourism agenda of the UNWTO is rooted in the growth ideology of the organization, as it is embedded in its social reality, which also then leads to reproducing this ideology in different utterances. Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) stated, that the tourism growth ideology is simply not matching with sustainability (p. 158) since growth has an impact on the environment and is therefore the opposite of sustainability, according to scholars. Nevertheless, the analysis shows that the UNWTO has a pure ideology, because the organization frames tourism as becoming more sustainable and that the tourism sector is striving towards sustainable growth. With that, they justify the growth agenda since it is sustainable growth, not just growth in general. As argued by Hall (2010), economic growth and sustainability are not compatible, and this is one of the major challenges to changing the mindset that these two aspects are harmonious. We are overshooting planetary boundaries with tourism activities and sustainable tourism in the future is not possible as stated by Rockström et al. (2009), Higgins-Desbiolles & Everingham (2022), and Fletcher et al. (2021).

In the analysis, it becomes apparent that the UNWTO is using green growth and sustainable growth to legitimize growth in the tourism sector. This finding supports Gössling et al.’s (2013) work which has argued that the depiction of green growth to meet emission reduction targets that are not feasible is oftentimes used to legitimize continuous growth. Similarly, the UNWTO advocates the green economy and green growth, by stating to work towards reaching the SDGs and to decarbonize the world through tourism, which additionally is backing the statement by Gössling et al. (2013). These findings agree with what Maslin and Poessinouw (2017) have argued, that the green economy could help in reaching and fulfilling the SDGs. Nonetheless, what is left out in the findings is what Asara et al. (2015) have stated, that the economic gains achieved by becoming greener are further reinvested into consumption. Scholars such as Hickel (2018) further argue, that because humanity has already exceeded some of the planetary boundaries, green growth cannot be achieved. Though the green economy and green growth are the focus of the UNWTO, they have also been addressed as buzzwords and popular to use in interviews, that center around environmental angles however green growth is difficult to tackle based on its need for investments (Priante, 2022). Furthermore, the word green has been regarded as mainstream and nowadays, everything can be green, which does not grant environmental consciousness and action, according to the interviewee (Soto, 2022). Nevertheless, when speaking about inclusive and sustainable growth, the UNWTO mentions the green economy and green growth as part of their blueprint for tourism development and recovery from Covid-19.

In chapter 5.1. climate action as a theme has been analyzed, which is part of the environmental discourse of tourism development within the UNWTO. It becomes clear, that whilst the regional director of Europe regards the Glasgow Declaration as an achievement and that tourism is heading in the right direction, employees that also work for the organization but are not in leading functions are more critical regarding climate action in tourism. This is shown by the interviewees advocating that more must be done regarding climate action. This finding agrees with what Van Dijk (2006) has stated that experts in social groups may embody and reproduce group ideologies stronger than others in social groups. Therefore, people like the Secretary General of the UNWTO or a Regional Department

Director may embody the growth ideology stronger than (external) tourism advisors of the UNWTO. Nevertheless, it has also been argued that tourism is not likely to transform towards more climate consciousness as returning to business-as-usual might be more important (Brouder, 2020). As argued by scholars previously, tourism growth is taken for granted by the UNWTO and the tourism industry, even in times of uncertainty.

7.2.3. The ideology of tourism growth

The critique that is presented by scholars, such as Dwyer (2018), Gascón (2019), and Higgins-Desbiolles (2022) however remains anecdotal, by describing the UNWTO to have a growth agenda, that the tourism sector is addicted to growth and that the UNWTO has a growth ideology. However, it is much more nuanced than that, as the UNWTO does not explicitly state that they are focusing on growth solely. Within the different tourism development discourses the UNWTO produces, their ideology builds the foundation for how the organization acts and utters themselves. Whilst at some points it appears as if the pure ideology of the organization is growth and going back to the status quo, as they do not know any different and are not aware of alternatives of their social reality, other times a more cynical ideology is underlying in these discourses. In addition, the UNWTO uses sustainability as an empty signifier to legitimize tourism growth, as in their opinion, growth and sustainability go hand in hand. Even though the main objective is tourism growth, the organization does emphasize on sustainability, green developments and engages in transformations regarding these topics. Furthermore, by accentuating the importance of following the SDGs and becoming more resilient, the UNWTO seems concerned with tourism's future. Nonetheless, all these themes have an underlying ideology of tourism growth that is reproducing the discourses within the social reality of the organization. Due to there being no place to discuss degrowth implications within tourism furthermore shows that the growth ideology is structuring their reality.

In agreement with the academic literature reviewed, the findings of the analysis show that the inherent ideology of the social reality of the UNWTO that prevails is tourism growth throughout the publications. This could be because the growth agenda that is taken for granted, according to Asara et al. (2015) and Gascón (2019), has not been challenged by the tourism industry. Further, the example of considering overtourism not as the enemy but as a lack of management shows that the growth agenda of the UNWTO is solely questioned regarding managing the number of tourists, and not by reducing it such as degrowth scholars argue. Similarly, Higgins-Desbiolles (2022) criticizes the UNWTO for its growth agenda and growth ideology as it creates issues regarding sustainability. The analysis results align with Higgins-Desbiolles (2022), as they show that the organization's dominant ideology is growth. Due to the dominant ideology, the organization's social reality is shaped accordingly, so it is reproduced through the meaning-making of discourses.

The findings show that the UNWTO has tourism growth interwoven in their social reality, reproducing discourses of tourism development that all entail tourism growth. This goes hand in hand with what Higgins-Desbiolles (2022), Dwyer (2018), and Gascón (2019) have stated about the UNWTO, having a growth ethic and an inherent growth agenda. The findings furthermore support what has been stated by Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019) who criticize the UNWTO for having a growth ideology. This growth ideology is highlighted in several different examples in this thesis, and becomes most apparent as a cynical ideology, supporting the dominance of the UNWTO in creating tourism discourses, as they exactly know what they are doing but they are still doing it. However, as argued by scholars, continuing our neoliberal way of living, decision-making, and consumption, we cannot continue with the same

level of growth because at some point there is no way to continue business-as-usual as is advocated by the UNWTO through growth discourses. Nonetheless, even times of crisis, be it the Covid-19 pandemic or war in Ukraine, the UNWTO still stimulates growth and is advocating the increase of tourist arrivals worldwide after the Covid-19 pandemic, as can be seen in the most recent publications (UNWTO, 2023).

7.2.4. The big absence in the UNWTO; the big presence in academia

One part of discourse analysis was investigating what has not been said or written. Regarding the UNWTO, what remains absent in publications is the notion of degrowth, as it does not appear in any of the UNWTO publications. Contrary to UNWTO publications, some interviewees responded in favor of degrowth, showing that they are aware of the concept but also stating that there is no space for degrowth discussions within the UNWTO. The UNWTO rethinks the tourism sector by focusing on transformations towards more sustainable and inclusive growth, compared to tourism scholars. If we look at what scholars have published about transforming towards more sustainability, degrowth, and post-growth discussions become dominant. Saarinen (2020), for example, argues that tourism needs to get away from the growth rhetoric that is ambiguous and does not support true sustainability transitions. Furthermore, to have truly sustainable tourism, Fletcher and colleagues (2021) argue that degrowth is needed. Degrowth requests moving away from the neoliberalist ways of living and consuming, and with that also decreases economic revenue.

According to Swyngedouw (2014) neoliberal growth is problematic and is therefore presenting degrowth implications. As argued by Fletcher and colleagues (2021), degrowth goes hand in hand with a shift away from capitalism and economic growth that is advocated by the UNWTO, however, it is particularly challenging to transform the ideologies as they are deeply engrained in our social reality. The awareness of degrowth as a concept by UNWTO employees, though its lack of appearance in the publications, shows the cynical ideology of the organization. Employees are very much aware of the concept of degrowth, nevertheless, the organization is still reproducing the business-as-usual discourse and striving towards the status quo after the Covid-19 pandemic, which is continuous growth. Also, one interviewee mentioned that within the UNWTO system, there is no place to talk about degrowth and that there is emphasis on how tourism can recover and grow more responsibly (Soto, 2022). This goes hand in hand with what Asara et al. (2015) and Gascón (2019) argue, that the growth agenda of tourism is taken for granted and not challenged by the tourism industry.

7.2.5. Scholarly relevance

The results and the analysis have shown that the critique of scholars on the UNWTO can be supported by my findings. Overall, the UNWTO appears to have a growth ideology and the dominant discourse is tourism growth, which is supported by using different themes that legitimize tourism growth. There are subtle mechanisms at play that are partly ambiguous within the organization's ideology, which need to be paid closer attention to. Within the UNWTO, the cynical ideology of tourism growth is maintaining the hegemony of the growth discourse. The UNWTO knows what the organization is doing, and they are doing it anyway. This thesis offered a more nuanced insight into how ideologies within a social reality function and that there are different types of ideology present within one reality. Furthermore, scholars have previously pointed out the growth agenda of the UNWTO without going into more methodological or theoretical detail to analyze how these statements are made. By constructing a typology of ideology to be used, future cases can also be analyzed and give better insight into how certain mechanisms operate in the way they operate. The different modes of ideology

presented offer a good basis to further analyze ideologies based on discourse analysis. With this thesis, I offered a more functional approach to how to use discourse analysis to uncover ideologies within a social reality. Whilst scholars before me have indicated the connection between discourse analysis and ideology, I went a step further and created a more tangible approach to analyze ideologies that have different functions within discourses. With this research, I was able to present the ideology within the UNWTO to be more nuanced and have different modes of ideology, it is important to state that these are my own interpretations from a second-order observation point of view.

7.3. Recommendations for future research

Several recommendations for future research can be identified based on the findings of this study. This thesis aimed to analyze UNWTO tourism development discourses more in-depth and with that discover ideologies of the organization based on the modalities of ideology that I established for this thesis. It needs to be acknowledged that there is a large amount of scholarly critique on how the UNWTO handles different topics, such as the SDGs, sustainability within tourism, tourism as a human right, tourism growth, and the influence of the industry within decision-making processes. In my opinion, this body of research is essential to be enlarged. Communication and collaboration between scholars that publish critiques on the UNWTO and the UNWTO itself is furthermore needed, to truly transform the tourism sector towards a more sustainable future. Directly engaging with the UNWTO is crucial for future research.

This thesis already provides a more comprehensive analysis that goes into detail about utterances of the UNWTO and the ideologies that lay behind it. Therefore, future research could bring more attention to how the discourses emerged on a timeline from 1975, when the UNWTO was founded until today. This would give a more in-depth overview of changes in discourse from 1975-2000, as this thesis has focused in more detail on data from 2000 onwards. Looking at how discourses from 1975 onwards emerged could provide a deeper insight into the organization and their social reality through discourse analysis.

Whilst this thesis focuses on the tourism development discourses that are present in the UNWTO, more research could be undertaken regarding the role of the critiques on tourism growth by scholars on the UNWTO, and what the relation between scholarly critique and the responses of the UNWTO is. A possible research question could be 'What role do external critiques on growth of the UNWTO play?'. To find out more about whether the UNWTO is aware of the critique on their growth agenda could already be a step towards actual change within the organization, as they then need to legitimize this growth agenda. It would be interesting to see whether the UNWTO is aware of the critique, not only on the growth agenda they are presenting, but also about tourism as a human right, the SDGs, their interpretation of sustainability, and the influence of the affiliate members and industry in decision-making processes.

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Appendix A

Table 3 Overview of collected data

APA Reference	Document title	Page numbers
World Tourism Organization (2011), <i>UNWTO Annual Report 2010</i> , UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.18111/9789284415359	UNWTO Annual Report 2010	80
World Tourism Organization (2012), <i>Annual Report 2011</i> , UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284415366	UNWTO Annual Report 2011	86
World Tourism Organization (2013a), <i>UNWTO Annual Report 2012</i> , UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284415373	UNWTO Annual Report 2012	78
World Tourism Organization (2013b), <i>UNWTO Annual Report 2013</i> , UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284416110	UNWTO Annual Report 2013	84
World Tourism Organization (2015a), <i>UNWTO Annual Report 2014</i> , UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284416905	UNWTO Annual Report 2014	88
World Tourism Organization (2016a), <i>UNWTO Annual Report 2015</i> , UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284418039	UNWTO Annual Report 2015	98
World Tourism Organization (2017), <i>UNWTO Annual Report 2016</i> , UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284418725	UNWTO Annual Report 2016	80
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World Tourism Organization (2005). <i>UNWTO Tourism Highlights, 2005 Edition</i> . World Tourism Organization. https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284411900	UNWTO Tourism Highlights, 2005 Edition	10
World Tourism Organization (2010), <i>UNWTO Tourism Highlights, 2010 Edition</i> , UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284413720	UNWTO Tourism Highlights, 2010 Edition	12
World Tourism Organization (2015b), <i>UNWTO Tourism Highlights, 2015 Edition</i> , UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284416899	UNWTO Tourism	15

	Highlights, 2015 Edition	
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UNWTO (2022e). Rethinking Tourism: From Crisis to Transformation World Tourism Day 2022. Retrieved October 2 from https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2022-09/from-crisis-to-transformation-WTD2022.pdf?VersionId=E2562wREejLJYZbb5IkplKFufBA9URdC	Rethinking Tourism: From Crisis to Transformatio n World Tourism Day 2022	59
One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme (2020). One Planet Vision for a Responsible Recovery of the Tourism Sector. Retrieved from https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2020-12/en-brochure-one-planet-vision-responsible-recovery.pdf	One Planet Vision for a Responsible Recovery of the Tourism Sector	12
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	and Tourism Economy	
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UNWTO (2022f). 117 Executive Council UNWTO – Decisions taken by the executive council at its 117th session. Retrieved November 30, from https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2022-11/CE117_Decisions_En_1.pdf?VersionId=BMifFPBNk7iz0znVOa7Vz5E0U8yul1VG	117 Executive Council UNWTO – Decisions taken by the executive council at its 117th session	16
UNWTO (2023). Tourism Set to Return to Pre-Pandemic Levels in Some Regions in 2023. <i>News Release</i> . Retrieved January 18, 2023, from https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-01/230117-unwto-barometer-january-2023-en.pdf?VersionId=.ZQ9Jc.2sxc.8k8hjInusug2Lcwo.P4Q	Tourism Set to Return to Pre- Pandemic Levels in Some Regions in 2023	2