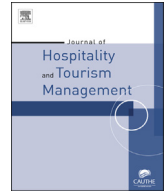




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The quest for a practical approach to morality and the tourism industry



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ABSTRACT

'Ethos' is a Greek word which refers to a person of high moral standards. Morality has been described as a complex and controversial concept. It refers to the kind of practices that deal with what is right and wrong, the policies and guidelines that support those practices, as well as the principles and values they include (DeGeorge, 1982). Morality gets more complicated when put in the context of the vast, diverse, and constantly growing tourism industry. Few research studies have been devoted to morality in the various segments of the tourism industry and are mainly theoretical. A practical approach is still needed as tourist organizations keep facing all sorts of moral issues without any guidance or support on how to deal with them. Their only source has been the United Nations World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) Global Code of Ethics for Tourism or other codes of ethics that were created by various tourism segments, organizations, and government entities to address such issues. However, a perennial problem has been putting the principles included in these codes of ethics into practice when faced with moral issues and dilemmas. How can a broad industry, such as tourism, support moral standards within its ranks? What is the value of deliberation about moral dilemmas regarding tourism? How can deliberation about moral issues be encouraged? The purpose of this paper is to offer practical and applicable strategies to contribute to the advancement of knowledge on how to apply moral standards in the tourism industry.

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry has been described as "one of the world's largest and fastest-growing industries in terms of volume of income and employment generated" (Kastarlak & Barber, 2012: 15). A key tool that is used to measure the extent of its growth is the number of international tourist arrivals. In fact, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimates that "the annual growth rate in international world tourist arrivals will rise from 3.2% in 2000 to 4.5% by 2020. The Americas will receive 4.0%, the East Asia/Pacific region 7.2%, the Middle East 6.7%, and South Asia 5.8% of arrivals" (Kastarlak & Barber, 2012: 15). However, as exciting and promising as these statistics may be, it must be noted that just sticking to numbers, percentages, and remaining focused merely on the positive economic impacts of tourism is not the most appropriate way to go about developing and promoting tourism around the world. Sadly, many tourist destinations around the world are still struggling to overcome the detrimental effects they suffered

from the rapid and uncontrolled expansion of mass tourism and that short-term profit-oriented mentality it was based on. In early 1990's, sustainable tourism was developed to serve as an antidote to that inconsiderate kind of tourism and introduce a softer, more responsible tourism development. For the very first time, issues of cultural harmony, respect for the environment (both physical and general) and social, ethical, and moral values were addressed. Since then, countless articles and studies (Björk, 2000; Chiutsi, Mukoroverwa, Karigambe, & Mudzengi, 2011; Godfrey, 1998; Lu & Nepal, 2009; Musarò, 2015; Walker & Moscardo, 2014) have been written, conducted, and devoted to sustainable tourism and its development. However, all these efforts have only managed to accentuate the huge gap that stands as an insurmountable barrier between theory and practice through the years. The tourism industry is still trying to figure out how to effectively implement sustainable tourism and those principles emphasizing moral issues. In the meantime, the number of moral issues, and dilemmas in the tourism industry keeps increasing. For example, Chinese tourists have repeatedly violated social ethics through their disrespectful and uncivilized behavior while traveling abroad (Johanson, 2013). This issue has not only caused a lot of frustration to many tourist

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destinations but has also led lodging properties around the world to turn Chinese tourists away (Johanson, 2013).

Taking all the above into consideration, it becomes apparent that the issue of fostering morality in the tourism industry is more eminent now than ever. On a theoretical level, Caton (2012) recently pointed out the need for a ‘moral turn’ in tourism studies by recognizing the wide range of immoral and irresponsible aspects that are involved. Other articles (Erb, 2013) have addressed the issue of morality in the concept of hospitality or in relation to a specific kind of tourism such as wilderness tourism (Øian, 2013) but they only concentrate on specific regions or countries and are still limited to a theoretical approach. However, the tourism industry spreads all over the world and touches various different cultures, and societies with different values and norms which require the need for a more practical approach which can provide a deeper understanding on why there is a lack of morality in the tourism industry and how it can be achieved. Furthermore, on a global scale, the United Nations World Tourism Organization’s (UNWTO) Global Code of Ethics for Tourism is the only official guide that tourist organizations can use and turn to in their attempts to find answers to their moral, ethical or other issues and base their policies on. Then, of course, a number of codes of ethics were also created by various tourism segments, organizations and governments to provide a more concrete foundation where tourism policies could be built on. However, it is quite questionable to what extent these sources are adequate to cover critical issues and deal with morals which vary so significantly from culture to culture and from destination to destination. It is already challenging enough for nations and governments to try to domesticate the United Nations World Tourism Organization’s (UNWTO) Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, but it gets even harder and more complicated to achieve at least a satisfactory compliance level of the domesticated codes.

The purpose of this paper is to address the following research questions: a) What are the major barriers that contribute to the lack of morality in the tourism industry?, b) What strategies could help the tourism industry get on the path to morality?, c) What are the key factors contributing to a nation’s domestication of the United Nations World Tourism Organization’s (UNWTO) Global Code of Ethics for Tourism?, d) How can nations ensure compliance of the rules they set? The role of this paper is significant as it is among the first attempts to offer a practical approach to morality and the tourism industry and shed some light on how this could be achieved. More specifically, the purpose of this paper is to suggest several practical strategies that the tourism industry can use to apply moral standards both on a global as well as on a national level.

2. Defining morality, morals and moral behavior

The literature offers various approaches to describe morality as it is a quite complicated and challenging concept. According to Beets (2012: 72) morality “refers to any aspect of human action and it concerns the goodness of voluntary human conduct that affects the self or other living beings”. Caton (2012: 1907) approached the concept of morality as “the human imaginative and discursive capacity for considering how things should be, as opposed to describing how things are—what is sometimes referred to as the “is” versus “ought” distinction”. Greenberg and Baron (2008: 54) described morals as the “people’s fundamental beliefs regarding what is right or wrong, good or bad”. Brandt and Rose (2004: 335) defined morals as “a certain set of rules within a small community, based on traditions and intuition”. Beets (2012) took it a step further and noted that morals are rules and standards, dictated to us by society or social institutions, to which we have to “conform” when deciding what ‘right’ behavior is. In the eyes of Aristotle, a

Greek philosopher, moral behavior refers to following “our own choice, our own measures, and our own reasoning” (Brandt and Rose, 2004: 336). Furthermore, ‘ethos’ is a Greek word which refers to a person of high moral standards. It stems from people’s heart and is a personal choice that they make to live their life with integrity by respecting moral and ethical principles.

3. The major barriers that contribute to the lack of morality in the tourism industry

3.1. Poor tourism planning

Tourism planning is a multidimensional activity which includes socio-cultural economic, technological, political, and psychological factors. Through the years, it has been concerned with facility standards, institutional factors, private sector and government investment projects, and regulations. However, key considerations in planning and managing moral issues have been ignored. Su and Wen (2013: 232) noted the lack of morality when it comes to “profit making, or to the logic of capital accumulation that underpins tourism development”. Holden (2003) addressed the issue of environmental ethics and the turn towards a more conservation based ethic which stakeholders have decided to place at the top of their agenda and make a priority. In addition, plenty of moral issues derived from poor and badly designed tourist development which was the result of lack of ethical tourism planners, experts and leaders. This is probably one of the most important things that the tourism industry is in desperate need of.

3.2. The challenges of the tourism leadership and management

It could be argued that abiding by a code of morals “means following certain rules and regulations voluntarily and consciously” (Brandt and Rose, 2004: 336). This would require that people are willing, determined, mature and responsible enough to do the right thing. In terms of tourism leaders and managers, this is also closely related to their leadership style and the way they approach moral and ethical issues. For example, Whitney’s (1990) study revealed that managers stick to traditional values, but there were also managers with strong belief systems of their own which they would hardly let go in order to follow a traditional norm. An additional barrier that complicates things significantly in the world of tourism management and leadership is the fact that different cultures have different ethical standards that can be conflicting. For instance, “in Indonesia, bribing an official is considered an acceptable cost of doing business. In Japan, you cannot conduct business unless you give the other party a small gift” (Greenberg & Baron, 2008: 62), whereas in the United States both actions would be considered illegal, unethical and inappropriate. Thus, expanding a tourist company and promoting a global strategy entails a number of moral and ethical challenges that require careful attention and raise further questions which include the following: Is it the company’s responsibility to teach its managers and employees moral values? How can a leader ensure he/she behaves ethically while conducting business abroad? Do they choose to follow the ethics of the country they do business in (ethical relativism) or do they go by whatever is considered ethical in their country of origin (ethical imperialism)? Whatever approach someone decides to take may vary, but one important principle must be noted: “It is a company’s responsibility to set clear standards of behavior and train employees in recognizing and following them” (Greenberg & Baron, 2008: 55).

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