



Tourism, the SDGs and partnerships

Regina Scheyvens & Joseph M. Cheer

To cite this article: Regina Scheyvens & Joseph M. Cheer (2022) Tourism, the SDGs and partnerships, Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 30:10, 2271-2281, DOI: [10.1080/09669582.2021.1982953](https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2021.1982953)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2021.1982953>



Published online: 28 Sep 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1340



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)



Tourism, the SDGs and partnerships

Regina Scheyvens^a  and Joseph M. Cheer^b

^aInstitute of Development Studies, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand; ^bCenter for Tourism Research, Wakayama University, Wakayama, Japan

ABSTRACT

In 2019, Massey University in New Zealand hosted the world's first research conference on tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The aims of this conference were to bring together a wide range of stakeholders to discuss (i) challenges to tourism contributing to the SDGs, and (ii) ways in which tourism can deliver on its potential to be more inclusive, equitable and sustainable. The need for diverse actors to work in partnership to achieve the SDGs emerged as a key theme. This special issue presents several of the papers from that conference, as well as contributions from a broader range of scholars. As is evident in this collection, partnerships in tourism tend to be complex, multi-faceted, subject to multiple legal frameworks and governance arrangements, and are often cross-sectoral, transnational and cross-border. While these overlapping factors can make it challenging for tourism actors to develop effective partnerships to deliver on the SDGs, the articles herein suggest there is considerable promise where stakeholders have shared values and commitments. Tourism scholars need to reflect more on possibilities for constructive partnerships because, as the pandemic milieu has demonstrated, partnerships spanning governments, industries and communities are a fundamental requirement to producing more sustainable tourism futures.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 13 August 2021
Accepted 14 September 2021

KEYWORDS

SDG; Partnerships; pandemic; Sustainable tourism; multi-stakeholder

Introduction: Origins of this special issue

On a winter's day in mid-June, 2018, I (Regina) sat with a group of my Master's and PhD students at Massey University, New Zealand for one of our regular 'tourism group monthly catch-ups' to check on progress and share ideas about our research. Not for the first time, we reflected on how much we were engaging with the SDGs across our separate pieces of work: Gabriel Laeis was weaving SDG 2 into his PhD thesis on the food that resorts were serving to guests in Fiji (Laeis, 2019; Scheyvens & Laeis, 2019); Heidi van der Watt was considering the relevance of SDG 1 (Poverty alleviation), SDG 8 (Economic development and decent work for all), SDG 11 (Reduce inequality) and SDG 14 (Life below water) to her examination of marine wildlife tourism in South Africa; Emma Hughes was reflecting on how small-scale tourism enterprises in Fiji stacked up in relation to the SDGs (Movono & Hughes, 2020); and I was considering the extent to which private sector actors could be agents for sustainable development (Scheyvens et al., 2016).

Ratified at the United Nations in 2015 and set to guide global development through to 2030, the SDGs urge governments, industry and communities alike to engage in direct efforts to work in more socially, economically and environmentally sustainable ways. As one of the world's largest industries, there is widespread agreement that tourism should address sustainability issues

head on (Butler, 1991; Jones et al., 2017; Mowforth & Munt, 2015). The tourism group at Massey University all believed that, just a few years after 193 countries signed up to commit to the SDGs, the time was right to examine the most effective ways that the tourism industry could respond to the challenge of contributing to a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable world.

What we wanted was a conference where we could bring people together to share nascent ideas on linkages between tourism and the SDGs. But no such conference could be found. We realized that we might just have to run such a conference ourselves. We had time constraints due to Gabriel's need to return to Germany to take up a new academic position, meaning that we had just seven months to organize and deliver the world's first research conference on the SDGs and tourism.

In addition to those already mentioned, we expanded the organising committee to include Tracy Berno from Auckland University of Technology (New Zealand), Karla Boluk from University of Waterloo (Canada), Joseph Cheer from Monash University (Australia), Apisalome Movono from University of the South Pacific (Fiji), Christian Schott from Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand), and Hazel Tucker from University of Otago (New Zealand). All were in agreement that the conference should attempt to link research and practice. Thus it needed to be meaningful for tourism industry, government and civil society actors, as well as for academics, not least because a partnership approach was needed to achieving the SDGs rather than placing all of the responsibility on a few actors. In fact, writing on tourism and sustainability almost two decades ago, Bramwell and Lane (2003, p. 1) stressed the importance of "Collaborative arrangements for tourism planning" which involved "the public, private or voluntary sectors, including pressure and interest groups".

We also felt strongly that the conference should take a critical yet constructive approach to analysing the SDGs. There is certainly a great deal of rhetoric on the virtues and promise of tourism as a tool for sustainable development (Avdimiotis & Christou, 2004; Lane, 1994), and there have been positive steps towards sustainability by many companies, governments and others (Hunting & Tilbury, 2006; Kapera, 2018; OECD, 2006). However, it is also claimed that the tourism industry has oversold its sustainable potential:

Tourism hides its unsustainability behind a mask that is all the more beguiling because it appears so sustainable. We too easily imagine that tourism as the embodiment of sustainability, when in reality it may represent unrealized hopes and desires for the world we want to live in, the environments we want to inhabit, and economy we want to participate in (Hollenhorst et al., 2014: 306).

We thus chose to run a conference on Tourism and the SDGs which offered the opportunity for a wide range of scholars and tourism stakeholders to discuss and debate both (i) challenges to tourism contributing to the SDGs, and (ii) ways in which tourism can deliver on its potential to be more inclusive, equitable and sustainable, in line with the values embedded in the global Sustainable Development Goals (Scheyvens, 2018).

So it came to pass that the Institute of Development Studies at Massey University hosted the 1st Research Conference on Tourism and the SDGs (#Tourism4SDGs19) from 24-25 January 2019 at Massey's Albany campus in Auckland, New Zealand (<https://tourism-sdg.nz/>) It was held in person with 72 presenters and 140 attendees present. The keynote addresses, plenary panels and two-thirds of the presentations were also livestreamed to a much wider virtual audience across the Asia Pacific region and beyond.

Accordingly, the aim of this editorial is to offer a reflexive account of the genesis of this special issue on tourism, partnerships and the SDGs in relation to the above conference, to explain why partnerships are critical to achievement of the SDGs, and to provide an overview of the articles in this special issue.

Partnership as a Central theme

Attendees at the conference were diverse, from countries as far flung as Fiji, Canada, the United Kingdom, Vanuatu, India, Australia, Samoa, the Philippines, Spain, and Timor Leste. In addition to

tourism researchers and scholars, there were government officials (e.g. from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment), tourism industry representatives (from Māori tourism providers through to AJ Hackett bungy jumping), and others from civil society (such as ECPAT, which works to prevent the sexual exploitation of children). This diversity was important, given that, as Goal 17 urges, more multi-stakeholder partnerships are needed if tourism is to seriously and more effectively tackle the social, economic and environmental challenges embodied in the SDGs.

There were three plenary panels over the two days, one on Indigenous development, one on the need for the tourism industry to take action regarding sustainable development, and lastly, the focus of this special issue, a panel on partnerships for achieving the SDGs through tourism. We chose the latter focus for this collection because it was clear that, with numerous sustainability challenges facing tourism, it will take an 'all hands on deck' approach to plan and implement more sustainable tourism practices across the industry. These challenges range from overtourism (Capocchi et al., 2019; Dodds & Butler, 2019; Milano et al., 2019), to pollution by cruise ships (Johnson, 2002; Lau & Sun, 2020; Simonsen et al., 2019), unjust treatment of workers (Le & Nguyen, 2019; Ross, 2006), unethical voluntourism (Ashdown et al., 2021; McLennan, 2014), and delivering a more sustainable tourism industry post-pandemic (Adams et al., 2021; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020; Lew et al., 2020; Sin et al., 2021). When many of these issues were discussed at the conference, the term 'partnership' was not always used, but it was often implicit in what was discussed.

The plenary panel on partnerships at the conference raised a number of important issues. This included Chris Roberts from Tourism Industry Aotearoa who spoke about how tourism operators have created a Tourism Sustainability Commitment, which aligns with the SDGs. This includes a commitment to managing resources in partnership with Māori. Meanwhile, Loren Rutherford from VSA (Volunteer Service Abroad) stressed the value of partnerships developed through volunteering, which can enable people from the Pacific and New Zealand to share their skills and experience. Academic, Jenny Cave, shared her experience around the politics of partnerships between academics and the community, and how they could work towards common solutions. Meanwhile Chris Cocker, head of South Pacific Tourism Organisation, spoke compellingly about the need for cultural collaboration and how Pacific assets could be enhanced through partnerships. Overall, clear messages were delivered about the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships in tourism and how shared responses to the SDGs will help to create long-lasting solutions.

Reflecting on the overarching themes that had emerged over the two days of this conference, it was clear to us – both from the presentations themselves but also from the dialogue taking place amongst researchers, industry representatives, Indigenous people, NGOs and government officials – that partnerships are essential if widespread action to deliver on the SDGs in the tourism sector is to be achieved.

The challenge of establishing good tourism partnerships

When discussing the efficacy of partnerships in wider development work, Sullivan and Warner (2017, p. 12) lamented that "The overwhelming sense was of a concept that had been wholeheartedly embraced but where little consideration had been given to what that concept could mean in practice, or how it could be taken up to scale." The same is true of the tourism sector.

Partnerships matter in tourism, but they can be difficult to negotiate. Different actors bring their own agendas to the table, and strengths as well as weaknesses, when considering prospects for sustainable development. For the 17 goals to be achieved it is insufficient to just have NGOs acting as watchdogs and reporting on ethical and sustainability breaches by the industry, but neither is it acceptable that the industry is simply allowed to self-regulate, something it has

lobbied for over a long period of time. Given the enormity of the sustainability issues the globe is facing, soft codes, pledges and the like that rely on voluntary support are not sufficient (Font et al., 2012). Governments need to play their part, but not by simply providing a generous budget for tourism marketing efforts, and nor by regulating to the extent that compliance costs put numerous small businesses out of action. For example, Rogerson (2008) found that 'Red Tape' (regulatory/compliance costs) was a major constraint to the development of small and medium tourism enterprises in South Africa.

Partnerships by their very nature, in theory at least, suggest shared goals, beneficial outcomes for all parties, joint governance, cooperative institutional arrangements, and inter and cross sectoral engagement. Additionally, Warner & Sullivan (2017, p. 24) stress that, partnerships should include: "...voluntary engagement, mutually agreed objectives, distinct accountabilities and reciprocal obligations, and 'added value' to what each partner could achieve alone" (Warner, 2017, p. 24). There are some important points here around joint governance and distinct accountabilities which suggest that partnerships should seek to circumvent top down processes and instead give agency and voice to grassroots stakeholders and those furthest away from the vectors of power.

This final point is important. Despite appearing to be a congenial term, 'partnerships' are not devoid of power relations. Nguyen et al. (2019) thus argue that tourism stakeholder interactions are more likely to align with SDG 17 when less powerful voices are elevated in the interests of working towards sustainability (Nguyen et al., 2019). For example, we can consider how Grootbos Lodge, located in a private nature reserve in South Africa, works in partnership with communities by listening to their concerns then also bringing in other actors to support initiatives. For example, the Grootbos Foundation partnered with the Department of Education in order to establish well-equipped, free-of-charge, early childhood development centres (Dube & Nhamo, 2021). Research done in the Bahamas confirms that successful partnerships working towards the SDGs take a bottom up approach (Francis & Nair, 2020). However, it is not just up to communities to take the initiative, as partnerships truly working towards the SDGs will also need to be supported by governments, the private sector and others (Deladem et al., 2021; Kimbu & Tichaawa, 2018; Polukhina et al., 2021). For example, Tham et al. (2020) observe that Indigenous tourism operations can definitely benefit from partnerships with government actors and academic institutions.

Types of partnerships

The question then arises as to what types of partnerships can work most effectively in the tourism space. As Graci (2013, p. 27) notes, tourism partnerships are not always formally constituted: "Collaboration through partnerships is described as *a loosely coupled system* of organizations and individuals that belong to various public and private sectors, who come together in order to reach certain goals, unattainable by the partners individually" (emphasis added). While this might work for some forms of partnership, to truly meet shared goals and hold each partner accountable, more formalised structures are needed.

The range of partnerships evident in the tourism sector reflects those in broader society (Bramwell & Lane, 2003). This includes the ubiquitous public-private-partnerships, community-based partnerships (as seen in community based tourism and pro-poor tourism), bilateral partnerships (as seen in international development projects funded by one country and delivered in another), and mulilateral partnerships (as seen in the work of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), Asia Development Bank (ADB) and USAID, among others).

Two types of partnerships appear dominant, and are profiled below: (1) multistakeholder partnerships and (2) public private partnerships, more commonly referred to as PPPs.

Multistakeholders partnerships

Given the tourism industry's global breadth and its multi-sectoral, cross-border and often multi-lateral nature, multistakeholder partnerships have tended to dominate the discourse on partnerships in the pursuit of the 2030 Agenda goals. Beisheim and Simon (2018, p. 497) describe multistakeholder partnerships as "institutionalized interactions between public and private actors, which aim at the provision of collective goods". The complex and multifaceted nature of multi-stakeholder partnerships "requires the adoption of an integrated approach, which implies reducing the barriers created by institutional silos and strengthening sectoral and subnational coordination across implementing entities" (Haywood et al., 2019, p. 567). Accordingly, this introduces the need for metagovernance arrangements that are considered vital to the establishment of more effective multistakeholder partnerships. In tourism this often encompasses the efficacy of tourism policy and planning regimes at local and nation state levels, but also regionally and globally as evidence by the predominance of institutions like the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) and Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), among a bevy of others.

In international tourism, transnational multistakeholder partnerships are increasingly utilized not only to implement global sustainable development goals such as the SDGs, but they also feature prominently in adjacent issues areas such as climate change, biodiversity conservation, and responses to natural disasters (Pattberg & Widerberg, 2016, p. 49). However, as Pattberg and Widerberg argue, the "problem-structure and social and political contexts will determine whether partnerships are the best means of implementation". Herein lies the practical constraint of transnational multistakeholder partnerships in tourism, especially where destinations may be competing for the same pool of tourists, or where their domestic contexts give short shrift to cooperation and collaboration in favour of self interest. This is especially evident, for example, in cases where tourism intersects with human trafficking and orphanage tourism. Here, the cross-border nature of this activity makes them subject to multiple jurisdictions and their attendant legislative frameworks, where crimes or breaches are subject to varying levels of action (Cheer et al., 2019). Moreover, one of the corollaries of orphanage tourism is international volunteer tourism where global travel supply chains and national and local governments are involved - unless a multistakeholder approach is employed, curtailing human rights infringements through this type of tourism becomes nigh impossible.

Public-private partnerships (PPP)

Another commonly employed partnership approach, particularly evident in large scale infrastructure initiatives, is the PPP. Oftentimes, such an arrangement is necessary where capital and or expertise outside the public sphere is used to defray the weight of responsibility from governments, and have this shared. Correspondingly, private sector partners base the viability of such partnerships around the economic returns that are projected and this can sometimes be cause for consternation when the costs of footing the bill falls to the public, or the benefits of any such scheme fail to trickle down or be mutually beneficial to parties involved. This accords with Graci's (2013, p. 39) assertions that "Collaboration and participation are needed in order to address the overall concept of the public good as well as environmental and social concerns in the context of development rather than solely market interests".

When it comes to PPPs in tourism, Zapata and Hall (2012, p. 64) highlight the tendency for such arrangements to be complex and prone to irrational behaviour, particularly where "organisations do not always perform consistently with the rational actor model of decision-making". This suggests that the quality of relationship among partners in a PPP, and their commitment to shared goals, govern the effectiveness of such arrangements. Very often, PPPs come undone when political pressure impinges on the continuity of such partnerships when adverse

outcomes become more apparent. For example, in examining the role that PPPs can play in climate change adaptation, Wong et al. (2012, p. 136) assert that “PPP is a relationship based on a shared aspiration between the public sector and one or more partners from the private and/or voluntary sectors to deliver a publicly agreed outcome and/or public service”. The problem of who pays in a PPP arrangement is also contentious but more so, is the question as to who is ultimately responsible for the delivery of planned outcomes and that things might not go according to plan. Evidently, one of the biggest constraints to effective PPPs is the extent to which parties to the arrangement fulfil their obligations.

Partnerships in tourism: highlights of this special issue

All participants of the 2019 conference on Tourism and the SDGs were invited to submit a paper related to tourism and partnerships for the SDGs to be considered for this special issue. In addition, a general special issue call was issued via the journal. The final eleven papers contained herein thus represent both presentations from the conference and some from a wider range of scholars. The collection of papers that has emerged demonstrates the breadth of diversity that characterises partnerships in global tourism. Readers will find empirical works that draw from tourism contexts in Fiji, Bali, Japan, Kenya, India, Spain, Canada, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands. Moreover, authors demonstrate the variations in the way partnerships in tourism are evident, particularly the ways by which they are formed and the success factors that make for productive collaborations.

Adie et al. (2020) challenge the short time frames often enacted around partnerships, noting that a longitudinal approach is needed. As an archetype of multi stakeholder partnership success, they appraise Humayun’s Tomb World Heritage Site and Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti in Delhi, highlighting that much of the success around what is ostensibly a public private partnership was built on over a decade of close engagement. Moreover, the alignment of values in the partnership process mean that an Islamic ethical framework was employed undergirded by “the inclusion of the input of multiple stakeholders and a justice-based approach to development” (Adie et al., 2020). Adie et al. thus propose that partnerships are formulated based on a flow model that acknowledges that “the total milieu of partnership formation in which the haphazard impact and coalescence of numerous factors, participants, and interactions result in the dynamic ebb and flow of issues within a partnership network, and the eventual decisions and outcomes, which feedback to the partnership system” (2020, p. 6).

The concept of collaborative design is a cogent segue in discourses that link tourism to the SDGs, although, as Liburd et al. (2020) are at pains to emphasise, collaboration as distinct from cooperation and other forms of coordination are vital. As they argue, “Co-design takes its departure point in designing with rather than developing for” and that “co-design can transform tourism practices and enable stewardship alliances for sustainable development” (Liburd et al., 2020, p. 2). In employing four vignettes in Denmark and Norway to accentuate the engagement with co-design principles, Liburd et al. (2020, p. 12) highlight emergent themes that underpin “how tourism researchers can work with complexity, stakeholder values and dynamic inter-relationships”. Emergent themes include identification with the task, designing and imagining and co-designing alternatives – all of which are predicated on “an attitude of mind of not merely being possible, but at all times a continuous, other-regarding process of becoming, which enhances tourism’s distinctive capabilities and human engagement with others and whereby tourism unfolds its being while contributing to better world-making – the SDGs” (Liburd, p. 16).

A world away in the Pacific islands, the notion of partnerships is entwined with Indigenous cultures where community-centered philosophies are ingrained in ways of life. Accordingly, the focus on community-level, private sector-civil society partnerships in the region’s leading tourism destination, Fiji, is exemplified. *Solesolevaki*, is a Fijian cultural construct that can be directly

translated as “partnerships.” Evidently, it is argued that “The importance of the role of culture and the place of Indigenous values within business practices and community partnerships lacks visibility” (Movono & Hughes, 2020, p.11). The inference drawn in this case is that rather than local culture adapting to tourism, the sector must acknowledge and respect *in situ* social and cultural frameworks that are driven from the ground up (SDG 10). Taking a critical view of growth is considered vital if partnership models are to address the underlying point that “Rapid economic growth can in fact hinder the establishment of effective partnerships” (Movono & Hughes, 2020, p. 12).

Also through the lens of an Indigenous context, Hoque et al. (2020) examine the role that non-government organisations (NGOs) play in attempting to direct tourism toward poverty alleviation goals (SDG 1) in Bangladesh. Hoque et al. (2020, p. 4) emphasise that “NGOs have gained recognition as important actors in developing countries where the poor have limited access to markets”. Within the NGO-tourism-indigenous milieu, tensions are reported with clashing perspectives on all sides. Thus despite a vital link between Indigenous groups and NGOs that intervene on their behalf, “NGO-facilitated tourism involvement has failed to bring any change to the community’s identity status nor to their land disputes” (Hoque et al., 2020, p. 14).

Pervasive power relationships in Bali are examined by Dolezal and Novelli (2020, p. 2) who contend that the quintessential island paradise “is trapped in complex tensions between the global, the ethnically diverse Indonesian nation-state, and the local – i.e. *kebalian* (Balineseness), which many believe needs preservation, particularly through local ownership”. When it comes to the scholarly critique of tourism and its development credentials, Bali is the poster child for how mass tourism has underlined rapid and sustained growth, yet its impact on the social and ecological inheritances of the island’s people remains mired in doubt. In making the case for community based tourism, Dolezal and Novelli (2020, p. 15) maintain that tourism “can create opportunities for the articulation of villagers’ agency, self-organisation and autonomy, restoring a balance to an island where mass tourism has caused an imbalance between the human, natural, and spiritual worlds”. However, the influence of exogenous parties in the expansion of tourism is a binding constraint that keeps power corralled to a small elite, and amidst the cultural complexity on the island, capitalist dynamics overcome commitment to a culture of collaboration and community empowerment (SDG 8 and SDG 10).

The accent on the community is furthered by Qu et al. (2020), but specifically the spotlight is on the role that entrepreneurs from outside play in the development of community-centered cultural tourism initiatives. The context here is communities at the rural periphery in Japan, for whom the revitalisation agenda is central to their struggles in the present (SDG 8). The critical success factors underpinning partnerships in this case are highlighted by the “endogenous networks formed and leveraged to construct locally meaningful and sustainable responses to new conditions” (Qu et al., 2020, p. 16). Moreover, the point is made that community responses by local stakeholders should not be seen as inferior to ‘official’ viewpoints otherwise “... the legitimacy of the entire endeavor is threatened” (Qu et al., 2020, p. 16).

The issue of landscape governance in a Kenyan context is appraised by Mugo et al. (2020) who submit that the layered nature of power regarding state relations with tourism communities has an overriding influence on the efficacy over landscape governance (SDG 10). Evidently, this case demonstrates that “in most cases partnerships are only able to effectively fulfil their governance roles with support of the government” (Mugo et al., 2020, p. 13). The inevitability of tensions among stakeholders suggests that power struggles and power vacuums may seriously affect the capacity of partnerships to strengthen and secure the SDG agenda (Mugo et al., 2020, p. 14).

Cross-border governance at the intersection between Spain, France and Andorra exemplifies multi stakeholder partnerships where national interests inevitably govern the approach that each party brings to the association. Ferrer-Roca et al. (2020, p. 14) outline that there are five key dimensions that characterise cross-border relations including: (i) scale and peripherality, (ii)

uneven development, (iii) complementariness, (iv) institutional differences/similarities and (v) methodological nationalism. The ability to sustain progressive partnerships in cross-border contexts are considered contingent upon partners being able to “activate institutional similarities as well as being well acquainted with the barriers posed by institutional dissimilarities” (Ferrer-Roca et al., 2020, p. 14). In essence, the ability for cross-border community partnerships rests on being able to be assured of cooperation among the various national administration authorities involved.

When it comes to the effective functioning for multi stakeholder partnerships, governance of the oceans and the life below water (SDG 14), ocean literacy is considered vital and “presents an opportunity to involve societies in the achievement of collective social, political, and environmental goals” (Garcia & Cater, 2020, p. 3). However, as Garcia and Cater (2020, p.3) outline, collaborative ocean governance through the vehicle of marine tourism is “particularly challenging in the fluid environment in which marine tourism takes place, particularly as the sector is dominated by a wide range of partners and SMEs”. The scuba diving industry is seen as an archetype through which the ocean literacy endeavour can be strengthened with Garcia and Cater arguing that diving can facilitate a transition from passive to active observant diver, with a special focus towards the insight-seekers over the species-seekers (2020, p. 13). Garcia and Cater contend that the roles undertaken in multi stakeholder partnerships exemplify a complex hierarchy where “Government is the main guarantor and facilitator; Science acts as the decoder of the sea; NGOs work as socially vigilant translators of the knowledge; and diving centres (with the support of international certifiers and their professional association) are the receptacle of that ocean literacy and the facilitators of the emotional [re]connection to the sea”.

A relatively high proportion of tourists’ spending in many locations is on food, and in recent times, attention has turned to the sustainability of food practices. In addressing the issue of global food wastage (which links to SDG 2), de Visser-Amundson (2020), raises the prospect of cross-sector multi stakeholder partnerships (MSP) as a mechanism for tackling global societal challenges. According to de Visser-Amundson (2020, p. 13), while cross-sector partnerships are not legally binding, their strengths lie in the way it “values each partner for its unique knowledge and capabilities (regardless of size and scope of operation) enables the MSP to create synergies and win-win situations”. Central to the Food Waste Challenge (FWC) in the Netherlands is the drive towards behaviour interventions or ‘nudges’ where “rather than applying force and penalties, nudging is a softer approach to persuade consumers to behave and make more pro-social choices” (de Visser-Amundson, 2020, p. 4). The key to strengthening future iterations of the MSP is in ensuring pre-commitment from partners, as a means of building trust.

The extent to which social justice and tourism intersects has increasingly been brought under intense scrutiny and with that, many and varied partnership models have emerged to try and address the marginalization of tourism centered communities (Cheer et al., 2019). The case of Indigenous tourism in Canada is appraised by Huneault and Otomo (2020), particularly, the extent to which child welfare is regarded as a matter of priority. Huneault and Otomo (2020, p. 14) make the point that “Having identified the impacts of colonialism and the current overrepresentation of Indigenous children within the Canadian child welfare system, Indigenous tourism management and development could be a novel way to build resources, strategies and new ideas for addressing some of the longstanding systemic problems”. Given the multiplicity of agencies and community groups involved in this endeavour, the imperative for multi stakeholder partnerships is pressing, yet they are notoriously difficult to establish and manage. It is argued that unless there is “public acknowledgement from the tourism sector in their public facing documents on how they are incorporating child welfare protocols and safety practices” (Huneault & Otomo, 2020, p. 14), the success of partnerships that the sector can potentially drive remains limited (SDG 1 and SDG 4).

Concluding thoughts

The articles in this volume speak to specific SDGs on poverty alleviation (SDG1), food (SDG 2), economic development (SDG 8), reducing inequalities (SDG 10), responsible production and consumption (SDG 12), oceans (SDG 14), and peace and justice (SDG 16), among others. However, SDG 17 may well be the glue that links all of the Agenda 30 goals, because for institutions, communities and organisations, pursuing the SDGs in collaboration with stakeholders is essential.

As is evident in this collection, partnerships in tourism tend to be complex, multi-faceted, subject to multiple legal frameworks and governance arrangements, and are often cross-sectoral, transnational and cross-border. They are also often influenced by the historical, cultural, political and economic backdrop of the time and unique to the place in question. While these overlapping factors can make it challenging for tourism actors to develop effective partnerships to deliver on the SDGs, the articles in this special issue suggest there is considerable promise where stakeholders have shared values or commitments. To provide the balance needed to ensure various actors work in ways which support others in the sector to work towards achieving sustainability goals, time should be devoted to developing stronger relationships between and among the various parties in order to build “a degree of trust and confidence between the partners” (Warner, 2017, p. 32). Furthermore, to overcome the uneven power relations indicated in a number of the papers herein, resources will sometimes need to be dedicated to “strengthening of the institutional and human capacity for partners to negotiate ‘on a level playing field’” (Warner, 2017, p. 32).

Across all of the cases in this collection it is clear that the best chance destinations and their communities stand of successfully meeting Agenda 30 goals, is through collaborative partnerships among the spectrum of stakeholders with an interest in tourism. Lastly, while this special issue has laid down a number of markers that signal important implications for sustainable tourism research, the capacity to examine how partnerships in the post-pandemic era can be employed for optimal tourism outcomes for stakeholders remains pressing. As the pandemic milieu has demonstrated, for tourism recovery to take place across the globe, multi stakeholder partnerships spanning governments, industries and communities is a fundamental requirement to ‘right the ship’ and enable the tourism system to reconcile system failures.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Regina Scheyvens  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4227-4910>

References

- Adams, K. M., Choe, J., Mostafanezhad, M., & Phi, G. T. (2021). (Post-) pandemic tourism resiliency: Southeast Asian lives and livelihoods in limbo. *Tourism Geographies*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2021.1916584>
- Adie, B. A., Amore, A., & Hall, C. M. (2020). Just because it seems impossible, doesn't mean we shouldn't at least try: The need for longitudinal perspectives on tourism partnerships and the SDGs. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1860071>
- Ashdown, B. K., Dixe, A., & Talmage, C. A. (2021). The potentially damaging effects of developmental aid and volunteerism on cultural capital and well-being. *International Journal of Community Well-Being*, 4(1), 113–131. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42413-020-00079-2>
- Avdimiotis, S., & Christou, E. (2004). GIS applications in tourism planning: A tool for sustainable development involving local communities. *Journal of Environmental Protection & Ecology*, 5(2), 457–468. <http://195.251.240.227/jspui/handle/123456789/4609>

- Beisheim, M., & Simon, N. (2018). Multistakeholder partnerships for the SDGs: actors' views on UN metagovernance. *Global Governance*, 24(4), 497–515. <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-02404003>
- Bramwell, B., & Lane, B. (Eds.). (2003). *Tourism collaboration and partnerships: Politics, practice and sustainability* (Vol. 2). Channel View Publications.
- Butler, R. W. (1991). Tourism, environment, and sustainable development. *Environmental Conservation*, 18(3), 201–209. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0376892900022104>
- Capocchi, A., Vallone, C., Pierotti, M., & Amaduzzi, A. (2019). Overtourism: A literature review to assess implications and future perspectives. *Sustainability*, 11(12), 3303. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11123303>
- Cheer, J. M., Mathews, L., van Doore, K. E., & Flanagan, K. (Eds.). (2019). *Modern day slavery and orphanage tourism*. CABI.
- de Visser-Amundson, A. (2020). A multi-stakeholder partnership to fight food waste in the hospitality industry: a contribution to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 12 and 17. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1849232>
- Deladem, T. G., Xiao, Z., Siueia, T. T., Doku, S., & Tettey, I. (2021). Developing sustainable tourism through public-private partnership to alleviate poverty in Ghana. *Tourist Studies*, 21(2), 317–343. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2F1468797620955250> <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468797620955250>
- Dodds, R., & Butler, R. (2019). The phenomena of overtourism: A review. *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, 5(4), 519–528. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJTC-06-2019-0090>
- Dolezal, C., & Novelli, M. (2020). Power in community-based tourism: empowerment and partnership in Bali. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1838527>
- Dube, K., & Nhamo, G. (2021). Sustainable development goals localisation in the tourism sector: Lessons from Grootbos private nature reserve. *South Africa. GeoJournal*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-020-10182-8>
- Ferrer-Roca, N., Guia, J., & Blasco, D. (2020). Partnerships and the SDGs in a cross-border destination: the case of the Cerdanya Valley. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1847126>
- Font, X., Walmsley, A., Cogotti, S., McCombes, L., & Häusler, N. (2012). Corporate social responsibility: the disclosure-performance gap. *Tourism Management*, 33 (6), 1544–1553. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.02.012>
- Francis, R. M., & Nair, V. (2020). Tourism and the sustainable development goals in the Abaco cays: pre-hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 12(3), 321–336. <https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-02-2020-0007>
- Garcia, O., & Cater, C. (2020). Life below water; challenges for tourism partnerships in achieving ocean literacy. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1850747>
- Graci, S. (2013). Collaboration and partnership development for sustainable tourism. *Tourism Geographies*, 15(1), 25–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2012.675513>
- Haywood, L. K., Funke, N., Audouin, M., Musvoto, C., & Nahman, A. (2019). The sustainable development goals in South Africa: Investigating the need for multi-stakeholder partnerships. *Development Southern Africa*, 36(5), 555–569. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2018.1461611>
- Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2020). Socialising tourism for social and ecological justice after Covid-19. *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 610–623. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1757748>
- Hollenhorst, S. J., Hogue-Mackenzie, S., & Ostergren, D. M. (2014). The trouble with tourism. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 39(3), 305–319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2014.11087003>
- Hoque, M. A., Lovelock, B., & Carr, A. (2020). Alleviating Indigenous poverty through tourism: the role of NGOs. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1860070>
- Huneault, G., & Otomo, M. (2020). From unlikely to likely partnerships for change-child welfare and Indigenous tourism in Canada. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1817047>
- Hunting, S. A., & Tilbury, D. (2006). *Shifting towards sustainability: Six insights into successful organisational change for sustainability*. Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability (ARIES) for the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage.
- Ioannides, D., & Gyimóthy, S. (2020). The COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity for escaping the unsustainable global tourism path. *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 624–632. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1763445>
- Johnson, D. (2002). Environmentally sustainable cruise tourism: a reality check. *Marine Policy*, 26(4), 261–270. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0308-597X\(02\)00008-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0308-597X(02)00008-8)
- Jones, P., Hillier, D., & Comfort, D. (2017). The sustainable development goals and the tourism and hospitality industry. *Athens Journal of Tourism*, 4(1), 7–18. <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajt.4.1.1>
- Kapera, I. (2018). Sustainable tourism development efforts by local governments in Poland. *Sustainable Cities and Society*, 40, 581–588. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2018.05.001>
- Kimbu, A. N., & Tichaawa, T. M. (2018). Sustainable development goals and socio-economic development through tourism in Central Africa: myth or reality? *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 23(3), 780–796. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.23314-328>
- Laeis, G. (2019). *What's on the Menu? How the cuisine of large-scale, upmarket tourist resorts shapes agricultural development in Fiji* [PhD thesis in Development Studies]. Massey University. <https://mro.massey.ac.nz/handle/10179/15434>

- Lane, B. (1994). Sustainable rural tourism strategies: A tool for development and conservation. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 2(1–2), 102–111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669589409510687>
- Lau, Y. Y., & Sun, X. (2020). An investigation into the responsibility of cruise tourism in China. In *Maritime transport and regional sustainability* (pp. 239–249). Elsevier.
- Le, H., & Nguyen, G. (2019). Reflection on education equity in Vietnam: Teachers' and students' voices in an English tourism programme. *Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration*, 3(2), 145–155. https://doi.org/10.1386/tjtm_00004_1
- Lew, A. A., Cheer, J. M., Haywood, M., Brouder, P., & Salazar, N. B. (2020). Visions of travel and tourism after the global COVID-19 transformation of 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1770326>
- Liburd, J., Duedahl, E., & Heape, C. (2020). Co-designing tourism for sustainable development. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1839473>
- Mclennan, S. (2014). Medical voluntourism in Honduras: 'Helping' the poor? *Progress in Development Studies*, 14(2), 163–179. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1464993413517789> <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464993413517789>
- Milano, C., Novelli, M., & Cheer, J. M. (2019). Overtourism and tourismphobia: A journey through four decades of tourism development. *Planning and Local Concerns*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2019.1599604>
- Movono, A., & Hughes, E. (2020). Tourism partnerships: Localizing the SDG agenda in Fiji. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1811291>
- Mowforth, M., & Munt, I. (2015). *Tourism and sustainability: Development, globalisation and new tourism in the third world*. Routledge.
- Mugo, T., Visseren-Hamakers, I., & van der Duim, R. (2020). Landscape governance through partnerships: lessons from Amboseli, Kenya. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1834563>
- Nguyen, T. Q. T., Young, T., Johnson, P., & Wearing, S. (2019). Conceptualising networks in sustainable tourism development. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 32, 100575. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2019.100575>
- OECD. (2006). *Good practices in the National Sustainable Development Strategies of OECD countries*. OECD.
- Pattberg, P., & Widerberg, O. (2016). Transnational multistakeholder partnerships for sustainable development: Conditions for success. *Ambio*, 45(1), 42–51. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-015-0684-2>
- Polukhina, A., Sheresheva, M., Efremova, M., Suranova, O., Agalakova, O., & Antonov-Ovseenko, A. (2021). The concept of sustainable rural tourism development in the face of COVID-19 crisis: Evidence from Russia. *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*, 14(1), 38. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jrfm14010038>
- Qu, M., McCormick, A. D., & Funck, C. (2020). Community resourcefulness and partnerships in rural tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1849233>
- Rogerson, C. M. (2008). Developing small tourism businesses in Southern Africa. *Botswana Notes and Records*, 39, 23–34. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41236630>
- Ross, G. F. (2006). Tourism industry employee workstress—A present and future crisis. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 19(2–3), 133–147. https://doi.org/10.1300/J073v19n02_11
- Scheyvens, R. (2018). Linking tourism to the sustainable development goals: a geographical perspective. *Tourism Geographies*, 20(2), 341–342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2018.1434818>
- Scheyvens, R., Banks, G., & Hughes, E. (2016). The private sector and the SDGs: The need to move beyond 'business-as-usual. *Sustainable Development*, 24(6), 371–382. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1623>
- Scheyvens, R., & Laeis, G. (2019). Linkages between tourist resorts, local food production and the sustainable development goals. *Tourism Geographies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2019.1674369>
- Simonsen, M., Gössling, S., & Walnum, H. J. (2019). Cruise ship emissions in Norwegian waters: A geographical analysis. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 78, 87–97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2019.05.014>
- Sin, H. L., Mostafanezhad, M., & Cheer, J. M. (2021). Tourism geographies in the 'Asian Century. *Tourism Geographies*, 23(4), 649–658. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1826571>
- Sullivan, R., & Warner, M. (2017). Introduction. In M. Warner, & R. Sullivan (Eds.), *Putting partnerships to work: Strategic alliances for development between government, the private sector and civil society* (pp. 1–12). Routledge.
- Tham, A., Ruhanen, L., & Raciti, M. (2020). Tourism with and by Indigenous and ethnic communities in the Asia Pacific region: a bricolage of people, places and partnerships. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 15(3), 243–248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873X.2020.1751647>
- Warner, M. (2017). Building blocks for partnerships. In M. Warner, & R. Sullivan (Eds.), *Putting partnerships to work: Strategic alliances for development between government, the private sector and civil society* (pp. 24–33). Routledge.
- Wong, E. P., de Lacy, T., & Jiang, M. (2012). Climate change adaptation in tourism in the South Pacific—Potential contribution of public–private partnerships. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 4, 136–144. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2012.08.001>
- Zapata, M. J., & Hall, C. M. (2012). Public–private collaboration in the tourism sector: balancing legitimacy and effectiveness in local tourism partnerships. The Spanish case. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 4(1), 61–83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19407963.2011.634069>