

PROSPER WITH PURPOSE

Anna Pollock's presentation to Toerisme Vlaanderen and guests

October 3rd, 2017

Author's Foreword:

My role today is to present the context for your discussions regarding the way the tourism and hospitality sector might prosper in the future and contribute to the prosperity of Flanders as a region and Belgium as a whole.

This paper is written as a narrative, not as a formal business or academic style report as the intent is to stimulate and engage by my "thinking out loud." It is not loaded down with references but sources and substantiation can be given when needed/requested. It is designed primarily as a conversation opener in the belief that all the intelligence and vision needed to build a healthy tourism sector in Flanders exists within the diverse communities that make up this country. You just need to find your own unique voice and sing together!

Roadmap

This presentation is divided into two parts. First, we'll look at why we need to consider making serious changes in the way we think about and "do" tourism in order to better fit with the changing circumstances in which we operate. I'll identify some "push" factors – necessitating change – that tend to be perceived as negative; and "pull" factors – positive reasons that inspire us to create change for the better.

Then I'll talk in strategic terms about the different ways we must approach tourism if we wish to thrive in the future.

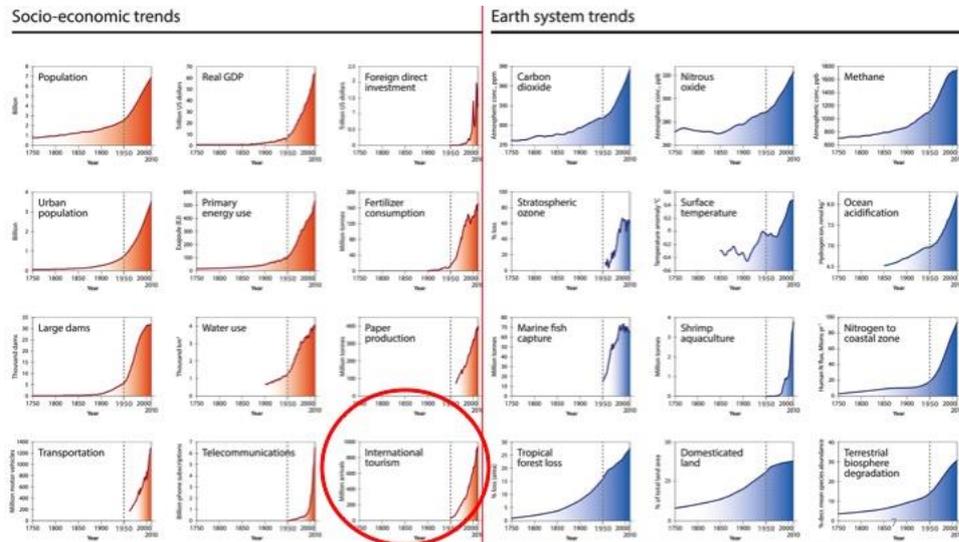
WHY CHANGE - SOME PUSH FACTORS

The speed and scope of change affecting every domain of our lives and circumstances is greater than at any period in history and can be bewildering. The American military have an acronym for it. Read their intelligence reports of the 1990s and you'll find reference to living in a VUCA world. That stands for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity that make predicting, planning and controlling difficult if not impossible.

So you have reason to be bewildered as we're right in the midst of the biggest cultural social; scientific, environmental shift in human history.

Even the geologists are prepared to admit we're leaving our mark in the stratosphere and should have a whole geological epoch named after us. We are leaving the Holocene, a geological epoch that lasted approximately 11,500 years since the end of the last big ice age during which the climate was relatively stable and benign as far as humans were concerned. We are entering an epoch named the Anthropocene to denote that humans are now the most impactful life form on the planet. Click on this [link](#) to view an impressive 3 minute film that traces the growth in our impact over the past 250 years.

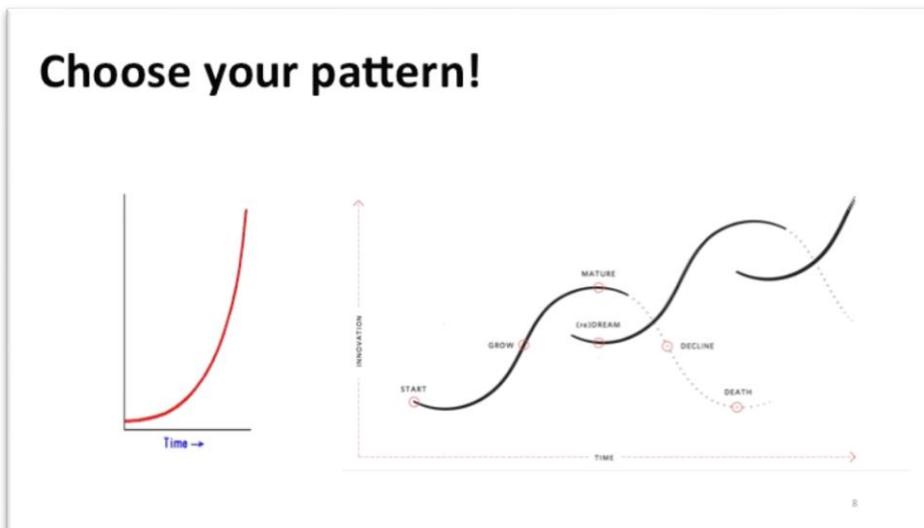
The graphs below that underpinned the data used in the film, describe what some scientists call *The Great Acceleration*. The orange curves on the left track social impact trends and on the right track earth system impacts. The time line starts in 1750 and the vertical dotted line marks the year 1950 when these upward lines took off. Unusually, because as a sector we often get forgotten, International tourism is included. – see the graph circled in red. You have to admit, over 60 years we've had quite a ride.



The *Great Acceleration* graphs beg an important question is – **is the hockey stick pattern sustainable?**

If you are in finance, politics, economics, you might likely say “Yes – I can see it in my spreadsheets”.

If you're a farmer, a mother or spend anytime outside in the natural world, you'll likely say “No, because this pattern doesn't exist there.”



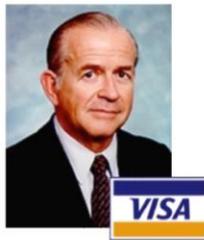
The pattern that governs all aspects of our life is called a sigmoid curve and applies to humans like me, the cells in my body, the trees you can see outside, whole landscapes, ideas, institutions, products, companies, destinations and even the future of whole sectors. Nothing in nature grows forever. If an element tries to keep expanding, Nature's built in "feed back loops" and checks and balances work to prevent it. A cancer cell is an example of a rogue cell that doesn't know how to stop but it too dies when it has killed its host.

The scientists, who really grasped this and the implications of those curves, published their observations back in 1972 in *Limits to Growth*. Their report was published the year I graduated in 1970s and the words environmental and sustainability emerged around that time. But it took another **40 years** before those with establishment authority were prepared to state what many others considered obvious. Finally in 2012, KPMG, one of the major conservative consulting firms had the courage to say with crystal clarity that business as usual was unsustainable. In the same year, Deloitte said much the same, but went one step further pointing out that the level of change necessitated a fundamental shift in mindset or paradigm – echoing wise remarks from Albert Einstein years earlier. We'll return to Albert later.

Over the past 30-40 years, the isolated voices who recognized this unique point in human history,

Where are we as species?

"We are at that point of time when a four-hundred-year-old age is rattling in its deathbed and another is struggling to be born – with a shifting of culture, science, society and institutions enormously greater and swifter than the world has ever experienced...."



Dee Hock, Founder of VISA and author *Birth of the Chaordic Age*

have become a chorus. One of them is an acclaimed businessman who in the 70s conceived an innovative way of sorting out what was then the chaos associated with multiple, independent credit cards. His book *Birth of a Chaordic Age* makes fascinating reading. It was his experience as a farmer – closely attuned to nature – that showed him how to create an organisation fit for a network age he anticipated but that hadn't yet materialized.

Two other sources that will help you understand "what's really going on" and point to ways of being that will enable you to adapt are Otto Scharmer's *Leading from an Emerging Future* and Giles Hutchins' *Future Fit*.

They and countless other leading thinkers now recognize that we're in the midst of a *Great Transition* equivalent to the shift from a medieval age to the age of enlightenment, science and industry. What's different is that this shift is occurring much faster, and affecting all aspects of life at once, and many of us know it is happening. The scale and implications are big enough to be classified as evolutionary. We are being asked to re-think what it means to be human. The big question – is how do we make that passage smoothly and safely and what role do each of us play in helping that process?

Now to Tourism

International tourism shows the same hockey stick growth pattern associated with the *Great Acceleration* and it seems we in tourism are both proud and very attached to it.

International tourism has grown phenomenally since 1950 and shows no signs of slowing down. Responsible for supporting 1.2 billion trips last year, it is forecast to double in less the 15 years. According to Taleb Rifai, the just retired Secretary General of UNWTO in [this article](#), growth is not to be feared or seen as an enemy, we simply have to manage it. I wish it were that simple.



Because, we need to ask, “Is this growth manageable? “Several academics have showed that even though many are making valiant efforts to reduce the impact or “foot print” per unit of consumption i.e., per hotel, per airport, per cruise ship, these reductions are not enough to compensate for the rapid increase in the numbers of hotels, airports, airlines and cruise ships. In other words – we are not decoupling growth from the negative effects of consumption

How do you manage a Tsunami?

In the meantime, the forces of globalisation which the tourism sector has both enabled and benefitted from, are producing new customers every month tapping in to the dynamics of rising standards of living in countries with huge populations. The size of the middle class population - people with the capacity to travel internationally – is set to grow from 3.2 billion in 2020 to 4.9 billion a mere ten years later.

Tourism has become a both right and a status symbol – a sign that someone had made it out of poverty. But having turned on that demand we really have no way of knowing how to channel it let alone how to turn it off.

All our institutions at the destination level are committed to keeping it flowing. Name me a national tourism body that doesn’t have the words “increase the number of visitors” in its strategy.

The appearance of “overtourism”

In this context, 2016 became something of a turning point. Someone came up with a catchy word “overtourism” that first appeared in a Skift article describing its appearance in Iceland.

Overtourism was later defined by the Responsible Tourism Partnership as destinations *where hosts or guests, locals or visitors, feel that there are too many visitors and that the quality of life in the area or the quality of the experience has deteriorated unacceptably.*

It wasn't as if overtourism was new- The Venetians had been protesting for over a decade. Books had been written about it recently – notably Leo Hickman's *Last Call (2007)* and Elisabeth Becker's *Overbooked (2013)*. What really captured attention in 2016 was that it was happening in Iceland a country caught unprepared for the consequences of its own success and also erupted in places where the “victims” were well educated, and had a voice politicians or media could not ignore.

Over the last 18 months the digital waves have been full of observations and quick fixes. In that time three myths have emerged. I haven't time to go into them in detail today but they can serve to open up discussion.

Myth 1 – it won't happen here. Overtourism can happen anywhere and with any market under the right conditions. It's certainly best to prevent and very challenging to reverse.

Myth 2 – it's simply a local management issue to be dealt with by municipal and local governments. This is a more unfair and harmful myth. ALL tourism is experienced locally but demand comes from somewhere else. You can't have a destination without an origin. Many of the factors driving demand are beyond the influence of the destination and serve the interests of those who have no allegiance to the destination. Tourism has been promoted as an economic driver to benefit destinations without either making clear that it comes with costs or offering to share the responsibility for mitigating and or paying for them.

Myth 3 – all we have to do is make sustainability go mainstream and that'll fix it. Of course we need to reduce our footprint but sustainability is ultimately about doing less harm and only slows the current unsustainable trajectory. It doesn't turn that course around. You could have destination with only LEED Platinum hotels using alternative energy and still experience overtourism. The resource with limits, but the resource that has a voice and can vote, is the patience of residents. When that's exhausted, politicians take notice and overnight tourism can become the “bad guy”.

If overtourism reveals three myths then it also begs two big questions.

1. Is it just another problem to be fixed or the symptom of a deeper malaise?

I believe overtourism is a symptom of something deeper and no amount of quick fixes will do any more than relieve effects and not cure.

In this [Linkedin post](#), I identified at least ten contributing factors – which I am happy to discuss if time permitted but today I want to point you to the real cause.

It comes down to the paradigm and mindset that Deloitte were referring to. The current operating model of tourism was developed at the beginning of the century based on **an extractive model involving the industrial-scale production, distribution and consumption of things**. That operating model was, in turn, based on a set of beliefs and values (a paradigm) based on seeing the universe as material, operating like a clockwork machine, comprised of separate, independent parts that could be studied, and, if broken, repaired separately. That model was extremely successful for over a century but began to show systemic and structural flaws the more it expanded and was applied to the creation and distribution of experiences and ideas. Furthermore, science disproved many of the assumptions on which it was based showing that the universe is not entirely material, inanimate, static, subject to only physical laws but a dynamic, living, constantly changing, evolving system of interdependent, self-organising parts. Matter constitutes a very small portion of what we humans consider to be reality.

2. Is it a crisis or “the” opportunity of a lifetime?

Overtourism provides a huge opportunity to expand the beneficial impact of tourism and re-design it to become a much more effective means of creating wealth and well being for all participants. There is no doubt that the industrial model achieved huge economic growth and raised material living standards for millions but that doesn’t mean it realized its full potential and operates at peak performance in terms of wealth creation and distribution.

A Crisis or BIG Opportunity?

Dying OLD "INDUSTRY" EXTRACTIVE	Emerging NEW "Visitor Economy" REGENERATIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More # € & \$• Exclusive, benefitting the few• Tourist – wallet, \$• Financial Transaction• Standards, sameness, commodity• Hierarchical, “top down” leadership• Silo’d, separate• Disempowering	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More positive net benefit, health• Inclusive, benefitting the many• Guest – meaning, delight• Human Encounter• Uniqueness, difference, value• Networked, grassroots, leadership is shared• Fully Integrated with all sectors• Empowering communities

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Applying an understanding of living systems, enables us to generate infinitely more prosperity to more people. In the extractive model, human encounters become transactions and places become products, commodities and things. Jobs are created but they are not sustainable livelihoods. The system depends on economic growth (defined as GDP) to compensate for diminishing returns but applies efficiency methods such as standardization, homogenization and commoditization that

diminish the value of each encounter. Wealth is created but relatively little “trickles down” to the residents of a community responsible for much of the welcome and support. The tendency to define, categorize and specialize has created separate silos of activity and knowledge that exclude, disempower and potentially alienate many participants in the tourism economy.

Thus overtourism provides both a need and an opportunity to re-design a better tourism taking comfort from the fact that we created the old system so we can create a new one both based on and made possible by the achievements of the old. A new paradigm, based on living systems as opposed to machines, is emerging and being both developed and practiced in every other field of human endeavour (agriculture, health, education, technology, business). It is time tourism caught up.

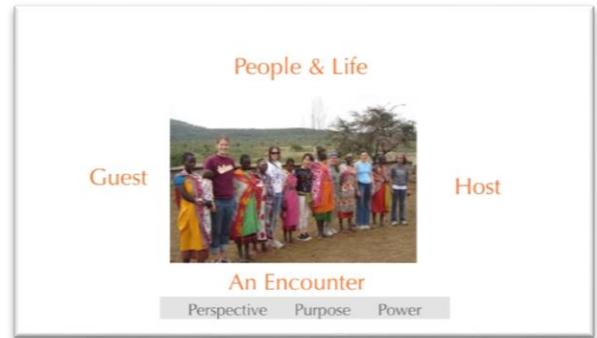
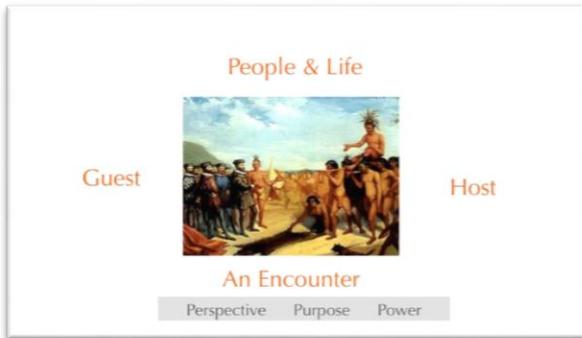
Unfortunately paradigm shifts in the past have taken huge amounts of time – happening gradually and imperceptibly over long periods. They have involved long periods of re-education, the dismantling of established institutions and the transfer of power and authority. Fortunately, since humanity does not have time on its side this time around, modern communications technology combined with much higher levels of education mean that such huge shifts can occur much faster than was possible in the past.

Thus far, in this presentation, we have looked at the push factors necessitating change. In times of crisis, then pain and discomfort can either motivate or paralyse – inspiring some to leap forward and start creating “the new” and others to resist and desire to sustain the old. This is why we are experiencing increasing levels of polarization economically, politically and socially.

WHY CHANGE – SOME PULL FACTORS

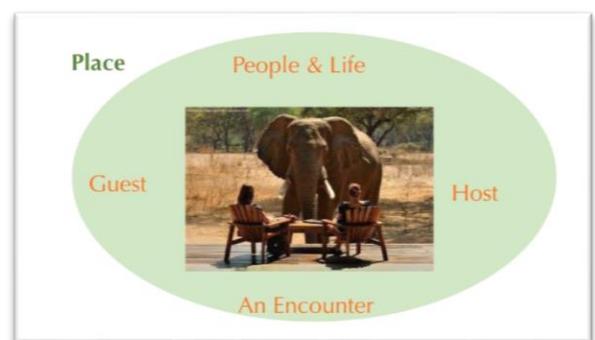
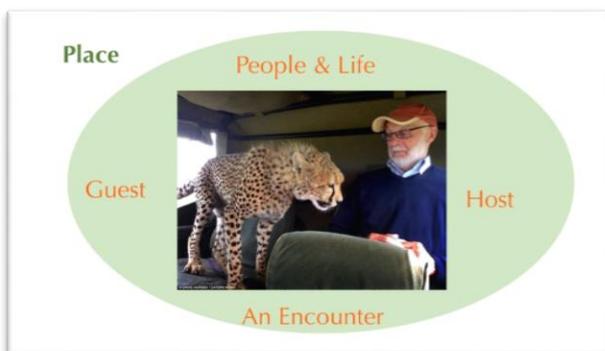
The emergence of the new is not guaranteed, especially if resistance wins over innovation. In order to make the changes as big as alluded to here a sufficient number of people have to want to and believe it possible to make the shift successfully. No matter how sound they may be, we cannot rely on rational arguments of the mind to be enough. We have to bring our hearts, instincts and souls into the equation. Then change becomes a lot easier to face.

That’s why positive pull factors need to be recognized and harnessed to give us the motivation to pursue the new. The good news is that there are many such factors, especially within the visitor economy and we will find them by “going back to basics” and reminding ourselves what tourism is really all about. The essence of travel and hospitality is the Encounter that connects Guest and Host i.e., People in Places. For the guest, the place is a destination. For the host, it is home. The two parties – Guest and Host – have an Encounter and the nature of that encounter depends on the *perspective* of each (their values, assumptions and beliefs about how their world works), their *purpose* (to experience, share, extract, exploit), and their capacity to achieve what they seek from the encounter (*power*).



The image to the left above shows the encounter between the king of an indigenous host community meeting an emissary from another ruler. The two parties likely differ significantly in their perspective, purpose and sense of power. The second slide shows four young women from a developed country having an encounter with peers living in a developing country and again both parties will be bringing a different set of perspectives, purpose and sense of power. In this case, the visitors likely have bought into the notion that they have a right to travel – a right likely not shared or unlikely to be exercised by the people they are visiting. Hosts need to have rights too and that includes the right to determine whom they choose to receive or welcome and how they chose to express that welcome.

All encounters take place in a geographically defined setting – a unique place - that holds different meaning for both guest and host. As every geographical setting is also home to other life forms, encounters may not always be human to human. The point to acknowledge here is these other life forms have rights too.



The reason I go back to basics and remind us of the people intensive nature of tourism is that it provides the best opportunity to harness positive winds of change.

When humans stop growing bigger they are motivated to mature, to develop their skills, broaden their understanding, achieve greater mastery etc. Human beings are really human becoming. They are not static, rational, utility seeking robots and, regardless where they live, seek to improve themselves, their circumstances and to evolve. And that's exactly what we're all doing. As individuals mature, so do societies and markets.

People – we do grow up!



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The image above is a different way of presenting Maslow’s hierarchy of needs that has informed our understanding of human behavior for seven decades. As individuals mature from being babies through to adolescence their needs mature from the essential food needed to survive, to feeling loved, cared for and part of a group. That stage requires learning to conform and fit in. Having established a sense of security and identity with the group, they are then able to step out and differentiate themselves before making their own unique mark on the world. Stage 4 in the diagram marks that moment of inner crisis when achievements and acquisitions seem hollow and the individual starts another phase of questioning – sometimes called in our culture, a “mid-life crisis.” When these shifts occur across populations they can shake and re-shape markets as is happening now.

We see it in travel simply because travellers and hosts, and owner-managers, and investors and residents are all human beings – their needs and preferences change over time with experience.

When people first travel abroad, they seek comfort and aspire to luxury. Later they want to use travel to strengthen relationships – buy romantic holidays, family reunions, or group travel with friends. Then travel becomes a means of strengthening self esteem and standing out. Guests seek to learn or stretch themselves through adventure or cultural pursuits or simply by taking selfies. Others take longer to grow up – this seems to be a problem with British youth on holiday! And now sophisticated and frequent travellers see travel as a way to grow personally, see life from a different perspective, to be transformed.

In short, demand follows a journey from the material, to the emotional, to the psychological and spiritual development.

This explains the emergence of experiential travel that Pine and Gilmore described way back in 1999 but that is only really becoming mainstream now. And the next stage after experiential travel

is Transformational Travel when travellers seek more than a fun experience. They want their perspective, their very lives to be changed as a result.

The Adventure Travel Trade Association recently took a more in-depth look at the changing nature of adventure travel and discovered a wide array of motivations of which experiencing transformation, expanding a worldview, learning and discovery nature were the top four.

A group of tour operators - some of whom have an in-depth knowledge of human psychology – have formed the Transformational Travel Collaborative – to serve this market

Finally, Maslow helps us understand why both Millennials and Baby Boomers also want to travel to “do good.” Travel + Social Good is a growing network of Millennials striving to justify their lust for travel by engaging in projects or buying from companies that “put back.”

This shift in values is affecting consumption in general (growing demand for labeling on food, learning where and how things are made, and a preference for locally produced, artisanal items) but where its impact is greatest is in the business environment. As we move deeper into becoming knowledge / creative economies, so businesses have to compete for creative talent and ensure that their employees are working with passion and effectiveness. Over the past three years Deloitte has been surveying 8000 Millennials around the world. They found that Millennials want to work with companies that have a purpose beyond just making a profit; furthermore they (74%) expect the corporations to be making their world better but only 59% see signs of them doing so.

BMG and Globescan have been tracking consumer attitudes to brands for several years and in 2017 found that trust in big brands, media and national governments had fallen to trust levels below zero while the percentage of consumers who want to support brands with purpose had risen to 65% even though only 45% felt they could name a company with a strong purpose.

Corporate executives are people too and have been doing their own questioning and change is taking place with impressive speed. While I have spent much of my working life being fed the mantra that Milton Friedman nourished, leading edge businesses – especially those which consider themselves “Sustainable Brands” - are going out still further as exemplified by Paul Polman. Concurrently we see the rise of Conscious Capitalists, companies that Aim2Flourish; growth in new forms of governance such a BCorps, social enterprises and cooperatives; adoption of concepts associated with both the Circular and Sharing economies; and a renaissance of grassroots, economic development/self-reliance initiatives within communities throughout the globe (eg Business Alliance for Local Living Economies in the US and TransitionTowns Networks – originally from the UK but now international).

In short, changes in society and commerce are creating an environment of flux and change that has an underlying purpose – namely to ensure humanity learns to live better together on Planet Earth. This is the context in which the actions of the tourism and hospitality sector will likely be evaluated in the future.

Having addressed why change is necessary, let’s now proceed to how we might both start and continue what will be a long and likely never ending process.

HOW DO WE CHANGE?

Let's remind ourselves what Albert Einstein advised.

The world we have created is a product of our thinking; it cannot be changed without changing our thinking.

*No problem can be solved with the same consciousness that created it.
We must learn to see the world anew...*

Just because this quote is overused and under applied doesn't make it any less right. Our future survival depends on **more than just slowing down the climb – we have to turn ourselves around** and we won't be able to do that unless we see and think very differently.

Buckminster Fuller also asked us to create a better model applying new ways of seeing and thinking because you never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, he encouraged us to build a new model that renders the old model obsolete.

And that's exactly what's happening all around the world – even in tourism where the responsible, sustainable ethos is spreading quickly as entrepreneurs, NGOs and enlightened communities experiment with new ways of doing tourism that improve the communities in which their activities are based.

This why I refuse to go down the route of offering glib, fix-it type solutions to the problems of overtourism. First, because the circumstances and context of the places where resistance and backlash occur are, like the places themselves, unique. There is no one size fits all approach. Secondly, failure to understand the system as a whole will result in cures that have unforeseen consequences and upset other elements of the system. Three, it leads to laziness. Once we are given checklists, our brains stops working as we focus on checking the box.

Seeing has two dimensions – one is all about re-framing i.e., changing the lenses with which you filter information. Sailors make very different decisions about where they go if they sincerely believe that the world is flat and that, beyond the horizon, the ocean turns into a huge waterfall cascading into oblivion. Mindsets are habits of thinking but they can be changed; they are personal and affect our individual decisions and become collective. Mindsets shape our values or what we consider important and appropriate and values shape our choices and behaviour. These take time, lots of questioning, self reflection and some analysis to reveal and understand and years of practice to change. But change they must.

An education process is needed – best undertaken in groups – to help people step outside of themselves and begin to see the hidden assumptions and beliefs they use to make sense of their world. This exercise is especially valuable in tourism where the mindsets and paradigm differences between hosts and guests can be large and failure to recognize and account for them can negatively affect the nature of the encounter.

In tourism, re-framing means learning to see the overall activity of tourism not as an industrial machine but as a living system. It requires learning how natural systems work –and learning how to

apply our new understanding to restructure what we do and how we do it. That may be a “tall order,” it can be done because it is being done. Tourism just has to catch up.

While re-framing our paradigms involves mostly our minds, the other and critically important way of seeing is “re-imagining” or imagining and that process involves our hearts, guts and soul – three other modes of sense making that shape how we feel and what we intuit.

In this respect I take a cue from an influential writer-poet, Antoine St Exupery. He is purported to have made this statement.

When you want to build a ship, you don't start collecting wood, cutting planks and distributing work, but waken in the heart of people, a longing for the great and endless sea.

If we wish to motivate and inspire others to change, it's not enough to draw up a plan, assign roles and responsibilities, targets, KPIs and expect change to happen. We have to both excite and tap into the longing within people's heart to experience something better.

Martin Luther King understood this. That's why he did not move people to heroic action by saying I have a ten point plan but shared a vivid image of what a better life would look like. We can do the same – now...

Get comfortable, close your eyes and think of someone you really, really care about – a friend, a child a parent .. Picture them in your mind's eye. Supposing you had the power to give them anything – **what would you long to give them that you believe would nourish or help them be all they could be?** As you imagine, try to distill your gift into one word. I doubt you longed for your person to be sustainable. Is there any life and vitality in that thought?

That's why Howard Thurman's admonition creates such a feeling of energy and hope: *“Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”* We are, after all , living beings. Yes, we can sleep walk through life if we wish, but at what cost?

What do we want our actions to generate?

What would we want for our children?

Well-being, Wellth
Health
Vitality
Resilience
Creativity
Aliveness
Peak performance
Joy

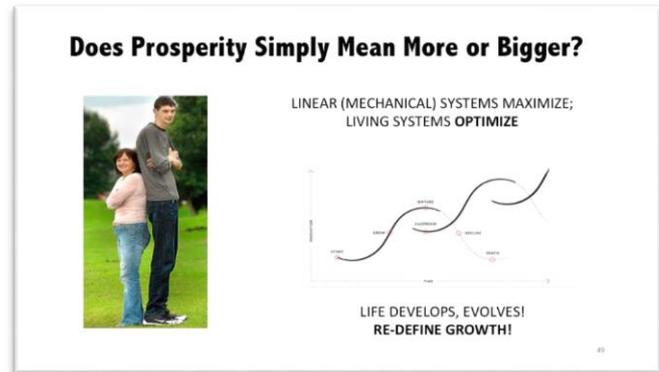


To FLOURISH

To PROSPER

So when you are longing something for your children, grand-children, nephews and nieces, do the characteristics on listed on this slide apply? Are these the elements experienced as flourishing or prosperity?

Does flourishing or prosperity simply mean more or just bigger? This poor man had a painful condition – the internal systems that turn off his growth hormones mal-functioned and he didn't stop growing taller until the doctors figured out the source of the problem. As stated earlier nothing in nature grows forever.



The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies has produced a great little video asking the question – *What is Real Prosperity?* [here](#). It can provide a good starting place for a discussion with your colleagues at work or friends and neighbours at home.

In summary, the very first step to making serious change is actually to take time out to reconsider why we're all working so hard. Almost every destination has as its goal “to increase the number of visitors.” The assumption is more visitors = more spending= more GDP and that’s a good thing. But we’re smarter than that. We know that GDP simply tracks all economic activity, the sum of all transactions and no way reflects whether they are harmful or benign, generating positive benefit or net negative impact. The fact is that certain types of tourism and too much of it actually reduces what the host community considers their experience of prosperity, of well-being, fairness, affordability etc. Keep growing while the host population is experiencing declining prosperity in the terms they relate to and overtourism is the inevitable end result.

I would have no problem with Mr Rifai saying “Tourism growth is not the enemy” IF growth were re-defined and operationalized to mean growth in tangible and intangible net positive impact on the host community.” But based on the vast majority of strategies that urge growth as in more traffic, then that re-definition is a long way from happening.

Step 1

So let’s start by changing our primary goal; re-defining growth and shifting focus on the health and flourishing of communities where the tourists’ encounter takes place.

I cannot take credit for the notion of flourishing – many others are considering it outside tourism. But I suggest it is particularly relevant to tourism for two reasons: 1. It encompasses both a human and an ecological dimension (ie social and environmental); and 2. It can be easily adapted to individuals, companies and places.

No living system exists in isolation and can be understood without an understanding the system of which it is a part and the systems that make it up.

Just look at me: I am standing here talking with you thanks to the efforts of 30 trillion cells and 30 trillion bacteria that are collaborating on a minute by minute basis to enable me to do so. There is no master plan; no CEO in control. My conscious mind even can’t process information as fast as my subconscious mind so really had no idea what’s going on. My living system is living simultaneously in multiple other living systems –biophysical and human in nature and my body, mind and heart is in constant state of communication with them and adjustment to them. Every choice I make –

whether it be conscious or unconscious – affects everything else and we now know that quarks and photons can communicate across space. Our webs of existence are very entangled. Even single bacteria have very recently been shown to communicate with one another using a form of electro-magnetic vibration. They might even be conscious too.

When individuals flourish they contribute to the flourishing of the organisation they work for and when those organisations flourish so does the community that encompasses their activity have a better chance of flourishing.

Because there is both a human and an ecological dimension to healthy flourishing we can draw on the scientific progress made in both those fields. The Psychologists have progressed from the study of malfunction and mental pathology to the study of health, vitality and peak performance. These states and progress towards them can be measured. Similarly, financial health of companies can be measured and tracked and so can the health of an ecosystem. This flourishing orientation can be used as a way to track health and movement towards prosperity.

So having changed what we define as success; then what?

Step 2: Create Living Containers where people and place can interact, co-learn and co-create.

The gigantic task of re-seeing the world and re-creating our systems has to start in earnest at the community level where the encounter between guest and host takes place.

But it will mean changing the way we see destinations – most certainly not as products (things) to be branded and packaged for consumption. But as dynamic complex living systems that are made of smaller systems (organisations, companies, individuals) and nested within larger systems (regions, nations, planet earth).

The term living container was used deliberately for three reasons:

1. we need to acknowledge some form of permeable boundary around a place and its people to identify common ground and provide a focus. But this boundary may have nothing to do what might have been drawn up for reasons of either political or marketing expediency. A key step in honouring the integrity of a place is to let its boundaries emerge in discussion with the inhabitants – “we tend to know who we are by where we are.” Over time, and with some serious digging into the shared understanding of what makes each place special through its unique geography, history, culture, values, and economy, the contours and boundaries and unique essence or soul of a place can be coaxed out. It certainly cannot be branded – seared into the living flesh of the place with a burning instrument!
2. Just because a place exists and people live within a set of shared boundaries doesn't mean it is a community especially when tourism is concerned. The term community means to come together with others in unity – to be aligned around a shared purpose, shared experience and shared identity. The visitor has a whole experience of a place made up of many different mini encounters with separate hosts. The guest takes home a complete impression, a memory. But, in most cases, the individual suppliers barely know of each other's existence let alone their interdependence. The old model has encouraged the hosts to see each other

as competitors for a “piece of the pie.” This is a primary reason why the old model underperforms. There is often no welcoming community of hosts with the interests of both the guest and the place at heart. Instead there is a collection of suppliers determined to extract maximum value from the system to “stay ahead of the game”. The real work is creating communities where none exist and have the tourism-related hosts integrate more closely with the other facets of community life – education, health, local economy, services, culture etc.

3. The image of a container enables us to look at all of the inhabitants in it and leave no one out. If you recall the diagram showing what tourism is all about, I said the nature of the encounter depended on the guest’s and hosts’ perspective, purpose and power. Power is about the capacity to do, to act, and to achieve your purpose. In that sense the balance has shifted very much in favour of the guest. We are told that “travel is a right” and “the customer is always right” and modern travellers increasingly see the “planet as a playground for their explorations” with no place being off limits. But this is plainly neither true or just if your perspective is that of a host, an inhabitant, for whom the place is home and your place is being invaded without your consent. As hosts should also have the right to say who comes into their home, how often, when, for how long and in what way, you could say overtourism is a human rights issue.

But there are other life forms in the container as well – as the tourists in the slides earlier realized. By seeing places as a two dimensional piece of scenery or a backdrop to specific activities, it is easy to overlook and under value the many other encounters that can enrich a guest’s experience and that need careful stewarding and protection.

So, again, what does all this mean?

Once we re-frame destinations as living systems made up of smaller systems and nested in larger systems we can learn from nature how best to interact and behave. There are many core principles we can learn from nature but each community will express and live them in their own unique way.

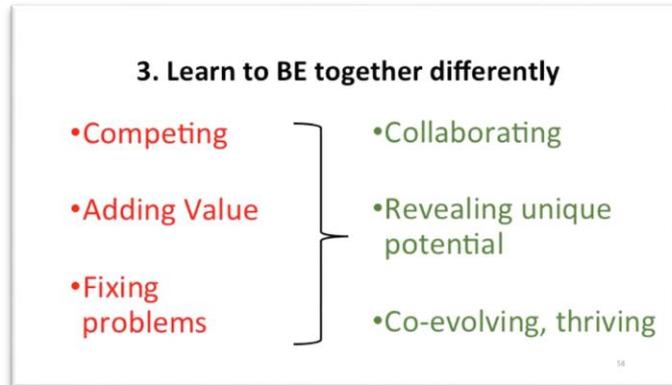
The starting point to any relationship is always a conversation and the best conversations attract and engage a diversity of perspectives. It takes some skill and practice to host constructive, positive and conversations that generate fresh ideas, pull participants together, engender a sense of possibility and hope and motivate participants to go ever deeper.

Fortunately a number of well developed methodologies exist to harness the collective wisdom and self organizing capacity of groups of any size. They include the appropriately named Art of Hosting, Circle, World Café, Appreciative Inquiry, Open Space Technology, ProAction Café, and other forms of storytelling.

This is neither the time or space to delve into this subject in depth, suffice to say that once tourism is seen as a living system of living communities of living individuals and organisations we can learn to make our relationships work so much more effectively by learning and working together.

Step 3: Learn to Be Together Differently

Having created safe spaces where all the participants in the tourism system can see the whole and their relationship to it and have learned to feel safe in the community, then it is possible to not just to be individually authentic but to explore the potential that exists within each participant and their relationships.



Once you see through the living systems frame, it becomes clear that nature’s mature ecosystems, that sustain the most life, are essentially collaborative. There is still a place for competition and the pursuit of self interest but not at the expense of the whole, the living systems of which we are a part.

Secondly, you come to appreciate that value is rarely added by an external party but unleashed, revealed or expressed. Potential exists within each life form but can only be realized in relationship with others and the whole.

Finally, our task is not to fix problems – when we do that we will, as Einstein explained, fall back into the mode of thinking that created them. Instead our role is to contribute to the unfolding of potential in all life – that’s called evolution.

The living systems frame brings a whole new understanding of DEVEOPMENT – not as in extracting, manipulating, making stuff to sell and let decay but as in un-covering , de-veiling and revealing the UNIQUE potential that exists within each one of us, each enterprise, and each place that wants to be expressed in its fullness.

Our primary question should be: how can we in the travel and hospitality domain help people, companies and places be all they can be.?

In the following slide, Ben Haggard of Regenesis, affirms the value of approaching this challenge community by community.



“If each place on earth is healthy, we can build the kinds of reciprocal relationships between the human communities and their ecosystems, so that they contribute something unique to the world, we have a world whose sum total is health”

Ben Haggard, Regenesis

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Conclusion

By changing our perspective, by becoming people who care about the unique places we steward, potential is unleashed and we can redefine the meaning of VUCA to stand for Vision, Understanding, Caring and Aliveness!

And you won't have to feel powerless any more!

Change our perspective



People who Care



Unique Places



Potential unleashed

Vision
Understanding
Caring
Alive

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Thank You!

Thank you and good luck

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