

Article

Tourism Degrowth: Painful but Necessary

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Abstract: Despite the well-known adverse effects of economic growth, the core strategic goal of a high proportion of destination managers globally continues to be the pursuit of tourism growth. Proponents of the dominant ‘growth management’ view claim that tourism’s adverse environmental effects can be solved by ongoing ‘decoupling’ of economic growth from resource use through more efficient management of tourism development, supported by improvements in technology. In contrast, ‘heterodox’ approaches, sceptical of the ability of technological change to restrict growth-induced environmental and social degradation, reject the mainstream growth ethic and its action agenda. Arguing that faith in decoupling is a fragile basis for the growth management approach, this paper argues the merits of an alternative ‘degrowth’ approach to tourism planning and management. The paper articulates the nature of ‘degrowth’, the types of policies that can support a degrowth strategy, and the challenges involved in applying a degrowth approach to the tourism industry. It is concluded that, while tourism degrowth is necessary, the approach faces formidable challenges that must be overcome if resident wellbeing is to be maintained or enhanced through tourism development over the longer term. A research agenda is identified, addressing the nature of tourism, the consumption problem, localism and downsizing, effects on resident wellbeing, business degrowth, choice of policy mix, and types of institutional change required to support tourism degrowth.

Keywords: tourism degrowth; sustainable development; resident wellbeing; overtourism



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1. Introduction

Economic growth is a two-edged sword, generating wealth, income, and employment in destinations, but requiring increased use of materials, energy, and land, with deleterious impacts on social relations, environmental quality, and vital biophysical systems [1]. Following decades of economic growth, wealth concentration and inequality characterise a large proportion of the global population, with a high proportion living in poverty [2]. Meanwhile, humanity is overshooting a number of critical planetary boundaries such as biosphere integrity, biogeochemical flows, land-system change, and climate change, with other boundaries expected to be crossed in the not-too-distant future [3,4].

The pursuit of growth is a core strategic goal of almost all economies and business operators globally [5]. Broadly speaking, the ethic driving this goal is neoliberalism. Neoliberalism affirms the virtue of market-oriented reform policies, with human wellbeing best advanced through the exercise of individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills, supported by private property rights, free trade, deregulation, and globalisation [6], with government enabling the conditions for the economy to expand. Embedded within the growing world economy, tourism is one of its fastest-growing industries. Tourism numbers worldwide are forecast to continue to grow faster than the world economy into the foreseeable future, fuelled by economic and population growth [7]. Driving industrial development globally, neoliberalism is responsible for many of the adverse social and environmental effects of tourism industry development [8].

Recent years have seen debate concerning the types of tourism that are alleged to steer the industry along an environmentally and socially preferred path. A broad but useful distinction may be made between growth management approaches (i.e., those

compatible with continued tourism growth) and heterodox approaches (i.e., those based on the conviction that the ethic driving tourism's growth should be rejected, or at least seriously transformed). Proponents of the dominant 'growth management' view claim that tourism's problems can be solved by better, more efficient management of tourism development, supported by improvements in technology [9,10]. Exemplified by the green growth and inclusive growth movements associated with the SDG 2030 agenda [11], this approach seeks to reconcile the growth ethic with concern for social justice, preservation of natural resources, environmental quality, and human wellbeing [12].

In contrast, 'heterodox' approaches are characterised by their rejection of the mainstream growth ethic, with scepticism regarding the potential for technological change to reverse growth-induced environmental and social degradation. Calling for alternative solutions to achieve human wellbeing outcomes, a common theme of heterodox approaches is that tourism's 'business as usual' will inevitably continue to deliver adverse social and environmental outcomes for destinations into the longer term. Prominent heterodox approaches include slow tourism [13], Buen Vivir [14], ethical and responsible tourism [15], degrowth [16], and regenerative tourism [17,18]. Themes common to these critical approaches include the need for a fundamental shift in values of destination stakeholders, supporting the renewal and flourishing of the social and ecological systems in which tourism activity is embedded [19].

A crucial question that must be faced by all approaches to tourism development is whether technological innovations with efficient management practices can decouple economic growth from its environmental impacts. With some exceptions [20,21], this issue has been neglected by tourism researchers. As will be argued below, growth management approaches share a common failure to adequately address the problem of 'decoupling' tourism's growth from the adverse environmental impacts that decrease resident wellbeing. Unless the critical 'heterodox' approaches address this issue specifically, they too will fail as long-term solutions for eliminating tourism's environmental and social problems. If decoupling is shown to be infeasible, the hitherto radical option of 'degrowth' of the tourism industry gains traction as a potential solution to the environmental and social challenges faced by the industry locally and globally.

It will be argued below that, given the barriers to successful decoupling, the hitherto radical proposal of 'degrowth', supported by only a handful of tourism researchers [1,19,20,22,23], emerges as a preferred strategy to resolve the social and environmental problems associated with tourism's growth. Accordingly, this paper argues the need for tourism's participation in the degrowth process alongside other industries. The rationale for this is that economic growth cannot be decoupled from additional throughput of energy and materials, which leads to environmental degradation. This paper explains the nature of degrowth and the policy challenges faced by the tourism industry, and it recommends a research agenda.

The structure of this paper is as follows: Section 2 presents the standard arguments supporting economic growth, along with the counterarguments highlighting the overall costs of growth. Section 3 identifies the types of arguments made by tourism researchers in their support for the growth management approach to tourism development. Section 4 provides a brief overview of heterodox approaches to tourism development that reject the ability of growth management to deliver net positive social and environmental outcomes for destinations into the future. Section 5 outlines the decoupling issue, central to the success of all growth management approaches. Arguing that the notion of decoupling is a myth, Section 6 calls into question the efficacy of mainstream management approaches to tourism development. Section 7 addresses the nature of degrowth and the types of policies that can support a degrowth strategy. Section 8 identifies challenges involved in applying a degrowth approach to tourism. Section 9 highlights issues for further research to identify and address the practical and theoretical implications of tourism degrowth. It is concluded that, while necessary, degrowth faces formidable challenges that must be overcome if resident wellbeing is to be maintained or enhanced through tourism development over the longer term.

2. Impacts of Economic Growth

Economic growth is conventionally measured as an increase in the gross domestic product (GDP) of a destination [24]. GDP refers to the aggregate of all incomes (i.e., wages and profits) earned from the production of domestically owned goods and services. This is equivalent to the total of all purchases made to consume the finished goods and services, as well as the sum of the value added by all of the activities in the production process. On the first measure, economic growth of a destination may result in an increase in residents' *per capita* income. Increased income presents diverse opportunities for residents to satisfy their preferences for particular goods and services. The second measure recognises that consumption expenditure reflects the value placed by consumers on goods and services. The third measure equates to the value of output minus the value of intermediate consumption [24].

In the standard neoliberal worldview, social wellbeing is regarded as broadly proportional to GDP *per capita*, since greater wealth means that more individual and social 'preferences' can be satisfied via market transactions. Since 'a rising tide lifts all boats', 'well managed' economic growth is widely regarded as the solution to almost all economic, social, political, and environmental problems [25,26]. While it is a key indicator of a country's macroeconomic condition, providing opportunities for residents to meet material needs, the inadequacy of GDP as a measure of social wellbeing has become increasingly acknowledged, with alternative measures under development [24,27].

According to the tourism-led growth thesis, tourism development stimulates local production, business profits, household incomes, and standards of living, increases employment opportunities, generates investment in new businesses, expands the economy's export and tax base, and can be used to finance the development of private and public infrastructure with respect to welfare support, healthcare, education, pollution control, and environmental protection [28,29]. Tourism growth can also assist in the development of the human capital skills and institutions needed to create vibrant local economies in remote areas. Given that tourism growth is a major contributor to employment creation—particularly for low-skilled workers, youth, women, and indigenous communities, with diverse linkages to other sectors—it has substantial potential to alleviate poverty in both the formal and the informal economy [26]. It is these alleged features of tourism development that underpin an implicit assumption in much of the tourism planning literature that economic growth, combined with good management, technological innovation, and concern for the environment and quality of life, will deliver long-term progress for destinations [9,26].

While acknowledging that economic growth can be beneficial in various respects, it is now realised that the costs of economic growth across the entire planet are increasing rapidly. To fuel economic growth, additional resources are needed. Given their fixed supply, non-renewable resources such as oil are rapidly being depleted, but so too are some types of renewable resources (e.g., forests, fisheries, wildlife) that are being extracted at unsustainable rates over time. There is mounting evidence of irreversible deterioration of important ecosystems, land and water acidification, excessive greenhouse gas emissions, destruction of the ozone layer, desertification and soil loss, an alarming rate of biodiversity loss, with growing numbers of species facing extinction, and a warming of the global climate, all of which are associated with human production and consumption activities. Population growth intensifies competition over access to limited natural resources, putting even more pressure on the planet's fragile ecosystems, overwhelming its natural absorptive capacities. Despite improvements in the efficient production of a range of goods and services, a 'business as usual' approach to economic growth in most industries continues to deplete natural resources and increase waste and emissions [30].

Decades of unprecedented global economic growth, characterised by overconsumption and overdevelopment, have not eliminated unemployment or poverty worldwide, and the distribution of wealth has become more unequal as some groups benefit much more than others [2]. The global tourism industry is a major actor in this process, often degrading the sociocultural and natural environments that generate visitor flows. Tourism sectors associated

with high carbon emissions include aviation, cruising, and accommodation [1,8,26]. Through mass tourism, resource exploitation, changing land use, and pollution, tourism's environmental impacts are growing together with increasing inequalities of wealth and income, community alienation, and cultural degradation, negatively affecting residents' social wellbeing [17,18,31]. Tourism's development often both responds to and generates 'overtourism', with resultant income inequalities, degradation of local cultures, closure of established local businesses, and creating a greater dependency of developing economies on developed ones [16,19,32].

Three factors strengthen the growth dynamic that generates adverse social and environmental effects: First, given increased labour productivity, economic growth becomes essential to prevent technological unemployment. Second, studies show that following the satisfaction of basic material needs, an increasing proportion of consumption expenditure comprises so-called 'positional goods' that signify social status. Given that individual happiness (up to a certain threshold level) correlates positively with individual income but negatively with relative income [33], unequal access to positional goods fosters rising consumption across the destination. Globally, consumption is a strong determinant of adverse environmental and social impacts [30]. Third, defensive growth is likely to occur. This is a process whereby, in a self-reinforcing loop, expenditure on market goods and services progressively increases in the attempt to compensate for the negative social and environmental externalities generated by ongoing expansion of economic activity [34].

The above overview of the advantages and disadvantages of economic growth has substantial relevance for tourism planning and development, both locally and globally. Ideally, destination managers would wish to undertake development strategies for tourism that retain the good outcomes of growth while minimising its unwelcome effects. The mainstream solution of social scientists, including tourism scholars, is to harmonise contrasting views of the good and bad aspects of economic growth within what may be called the 'growth management' approach.

3. The Mainstream Tourism Approach: Growth Management

Improved growth management is argued to be necessary to achieve sustainable development, enhancing the human wellbeing and social equity outcomes from economic growth while reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. Sustainable development itself is defined as growth that meets the needs and aspirations of the current population economically, socially, and environmentally, without compromising those of future generations [35].

Several countries and international organisations, such as UNEP [36] and the OECD [37,38], share a conviction that there is substantial scope for destinations to grow cleaner, more resource-efficient, and more resilient, without growing more slowly. The most prominent growth management approaches are 'Green Growth', focusing on environmental sustainability [39], and 'Inclusive Growth', focusing on social sustainability [40]. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 agenda explicitly affirms an ongoing need for 'sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all', alleviating poverty with efficiency improvements reconciling the tension between growth and ecological sustainability [11].

Consistent with the growth management approach, tourism growth is lauded as important to all destinations [41], while the UNWTO [8] has recently declared that 'growth is not the enemy, it is how we manage it'. Specific policies to achieve success include good visitor management, exploring green technologies that are less material/resource/energy-intensive, addressing inequalities (particularly poverty), taxation reform, transparent governance processes, enforcement of regulations to protect valued environments, incentives for green growth, capacity building, correcting individual consumer behaviour, and the development of integrated planning processes that value societal impacts and ensure that natural capital continues to provide the environmental services that support human life and wellbeing [8,11].

The growth management approach is pervasive in tourism destinations' strategy formulation and implementation. Due to tourism's close links to numerous other industries at the destination and international levels, even small improvements in tourism's sustainable development are considered to support a global shift towards cleaner, low-carbon economic growth [37]. Growth management strategies explicitly anchor several recently developed destination and tourism business management plans supported by the UNWTO (<https://www.unwto.org/investment/business-investing>, accessed on 2 May 2023). Tourism destination websites, emphasise the importance of increased visitor numbers and their expenditure, revealing the growth ethic underpinning destination marketing activity [19]. National tourism planning typically consists of a SWOT analysis comprising strategies to build on strengths to promote growth, resolving weaknesses of growth, countering threats to growth, and expanding opportunities for growth [26,41]. In the destination competitiveness literature, improved attractions, management, and marketing are recommended to induce greater demand for tourist industry products and services, generating additional economic contributions to the destination [42]. Tourism researchers have recently enthusiastically supported 'green growth' as an effective way to 'sustainably develop' the tourism industry [43,44]. Recognising the costs of tourism growth, tourism economists focus on how constraints to growth can be overcome and associated market failures addressed [26,45]. The pro-growth ethic of tourism researchers is generally evidenced by the huge body of literature addressing ways for tourism to resume growth following various crises, such as 9/11, SARS, the Global Financial Crisis, and COVID-19 [46–48].

4. The Heterodox Alternative

As noted above, 'heterodox' approaches to tourism development are sceptical of the potential for technological change to reverse growth-induced environmental and social degradation. A common theme of heterodox approaches is that tourism's 'business as usual' will inevitably continue to deliver adverse social and environmental outcomes for destinations into the future. Alternative solutions include the infusion of values such as those associated with *Buen Vivir*, a defining characteristic of which is harmony among human beings, and also between human beings and nature. *Buen Vivir* emphasises the notion of a collective wellbeing encompassing both society and the environment. The movement places a premium on solidarity, reciprocity, and an ecocentric way of life confronting social and environmental issues in a holistic way. While the notion of *Buen Vivir* is promoted by some tourism scholars [14], the approach does not imply degrowth as such. Another growing movement that is critical of the growth ethic is regenerative tourism. Regenerative tourism is that which replenishes, revitalises, and contributes to the long-term flourishing of destination communities and environments [17]. It emphasises systemic, long-term thinking, respect for human values and nature's laws, and opportunities for self-renewal in changing economic, social, and environmental circumstances [18]. Claims in support of regenerative tourism include the elimination of overconsumption, the need for long-term perspectives in decision-making, the need for a fundamental shift in the values of all destination stakeholders, emphasis on the wellbeing of all living things, and a sense of stewardship, caring, respect, equity, transparency, inclusion, innovation, and collaboration, supporting the renewal and flourishing of social and ecological systems [17,18].

In the wider social science literature, the notion of 'degrowth' as a response to the failures of growth management approaches is attracting increased attention [4,49,50]. Proponents of degrowth are addressing various issues, such as the nature of degrowth, its advantages and limitations, the institutional changes required, barriers to policy implementation, and the potential effects on human wellbeing, both locally and globally.

While critical of growth management approaches in general, only a handful of heterodox scholars have argued for actual 'degrowth' of the tourism industry. Some pioneering work was undertaken by Konstantinos Andriotis [1]. Another early and prominent tourism degrowther is Michael Hall [20], who has published a range of papers critical of the notion of green growth and related growth management approaches. Hall highlights corporate

interests as barriers to change and identifies how tourism education and research enable growthism, overconsumption, and industry orthodoxies as part of ‘business as usual’ practices [16,23,31]. Other prominent proponents of tourism degrowth include Robert Fletcher [6,21,22] and Freya Higgins-Desboilles [19,32]. Each of these researchers doubts the ability of the degrowth approach to replace the dominant growth management mindset within a capitalist political system.

A major reason for seeking an alternative to growth management is its failure to ‘decouple’ economic growth from resource use and its adverse environmental effects [50,51]. If decoupling can be exposed as fanciful, the case for degrowth becomes compelling, whether in tourism or other industries.

5. The Decoupling Issue

In general, environmental problems are considered to be driven by population growth, overuse of natural resources, and overconsumption [38,49]. A distinguishing feature of the growth management research efforts, both in tourism and in the social sciences generally, is an optimism regarding the ability of technology to shift the production of goods and services towards less material- and energy-intensive activities and develop more resource-efficient production processes with less emissions [9,10]. This technological optimism extends to the heroic assumption that GDP can be ‘decoupled’ from resource use, allowing the global economy to continue to grow while environmental impacts decline [36]. Decoupling applies both to resource use (resource decoupling) and environmental impact (impact decoupling). Herein, we use the term ‘decoupling’ to refer to both types. *Absolute decoupling* implies that the economy is growing while the amount of resource use and/or environmental impact is declining. This occurs if technological efficiencies allow fewer natural resources to be used per unit of production (eco-efficiency), with less overall environmental damage (eco-effectiveness) associated with the production and consumption of goods and services—more GDP coincides with lower resource use and emissions [49]. In contrast, *relative decoupling* implies a gain in environmental efficiency; resource use still increases, but less rapidly than GDP increases [30,50]. Examples of relative decoupling in the tourism industry could include reductions in the carbon footprint of hotel operations due to efficiency measures, or lower emissions in the aviation sector due to improved traffic control technology.

To achieve decoupling, whether absolute or relative, growth management approaches rely on the development of technologies to improve the resource efficiency of production, allowing increased production with a reduction in resource use across different economic sectors. The idea of decoupling ‘environmental bads’ from ‘economic goods’ implies that advances in areas such as energy technologies, materials science, information and communications technologies, and advanced manufacturing processes will support continued economic growth, associated with a substantial reduction in the use and waste of key primary commodities, reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and other forms of pollution, and diminished loss of biodiversity [50]. Decoupling is now widely regarded as a key enabler in the transition to a green, more resource-efficient, and less carbon-intensive economy while maintaining economic growth, as well as a means of eliminating poverty and reducing inequalities of wealth and income while conforming to biophysical resource limits [36]. Decoupling has been explicitly endorsed by organisations such as the World Bank [51] and the OECD [38], and it has been incorporated into the United Nations’ ‘Sustainable Development Goals’ [11,52]. Without decoupling, the SDGs themselves will be unachievable [53]. Unsurprisingly, decoupling has now become a key ideological pillar of the neoliberal growth ethic [54]. If, however, optimism regarding successful decoupling is misplaced, and technology does not represent the panacea that it is assumed to be, an alternative solution (e.g., degrowth) must be sought to resolve the problem of growth-induced environmental degradation.

6. The Myth of Decoupling

6.1. The IPAT Identity

Growth management proponents affirm that as long as improvements in productivity restrict resource use, growth in consumption *per capita* can continue even with a growing population. A simple equation (the so-called 'IPAT identity') highlights the extent to which technological optimism underpins pro-growth management approaches, including the mainstream tourism industry view. This equation suggests that at least three factors influence anthropogenic environmental change: the population, a measure of activity per person, and some measure of the average impact of each unit of activity on the environment [55]. Specifically, the equation $I = P \cdot A \cdot T$ maintains that environmental impacts (I) on a destination (local or global), resulting from creating, transporting, and disposing of the goods, services, and amenities produced and consumed at the destination, are the product of the population size (P), affluence (A)—measured by *per capita* GDP or consumption—and technology (T), measured by the amount of resources needed or waste created in producing each unit of consumption. As consumption increases as a result of growth-induced affluence, the total environmental impact increases as well. These impacts vary depending on the particular developments and the associated wastes.

Fundamentally, the IPAT identity demonstrates that optimism regarding the ability of new technology to reduce emissions associated with human activity translates to optimism regarding the prospect of ongoing 'decoupling' of economic growth from resource use [21]. The equation shows that, with a rising population and rising affluence generating greater consumption, environmental impacts will inevitably increase unless the rate of technological improvement is sufficient to counteract this. With growing population and increasing GDP *per capita*, relative decoupling occurs as long as T becomes more efficient (i.e., the T measure falls). However, the overall level of emissions may not fall. For relative decoupling to lead to absolute decoupling, emission levels must fall over time despite increased economic output [56]. Absolute decoupling will occur when the rate of relative decoupling is greater than the rates of increase in population and income combined. This only occurs if T declines rapidly enough to outrun the growth rates of population (P) and income per capita (A). If technical change fails in this task, economic growth will continue to degrade the environment.

There are several reasons to be sceptical of the ability of technology to disconnect economic growth from its ecological impact as demanded by decoupling [4,50]. Absolute decoupling in any destination requires increases in resource productivity to be greater than the rate of economic growth. Globally, this has been estimated to require a productivity rate increase of at least ten times what has historically been achieved [54]. To meet the widely promoted 1.5 °C target, emissions must decrease by around 45% by 2030 to reach 'net zero' by 2050 [56]. There is also a time constraint for the needed decoupling of CO₂ emissions to occur [57]. Meanwhile, there is no evidence that absolute decoupling, requiring reduced energy while GDP continues to grow, is occurring in any economy in the world [30,54]. Any presumed empirical support for decoupling results from failure to incorporate the full environmental impact of shifting the material and environmental burden of production onto other destinations. Modern economies are widely interconnected trading many material and immaterial goods from outside their geographical borders. The global tourism industry is particularly noteworthy with respect to its 'openness to trade', prompting caution regarding the effectiveness of decoupling within many of its component industry sectors [58]. Tentative evidence for decoupling largely disappears when trade and outsourcing are fully accounted for [59,60].

In the tourism industry, the growth of emissions continues to outstrip improvements in energy efficiency and reductions in emissions per tourist [61]. Between 2009 and 2013, tourism increased by 30%, generating a 14% increase in carbon emissions globally [30]. Given that there are biophysical limits to what can be achieved through technological innovation, a growing number of critics claim that it is theoretically and empirically unrealistic to expect the decoupling of constantly growing material and energy use from its biophysical

base [23,59,62]. With some recent exceptions [63,64], this issue is yet to be addressed by tourism researchers. Growth models developed for other industry studies project that absolute decoupling cannot be achieved even under the most optimistic assumptions [21].

In addition to the substantial unlikelihood of ever achieving the required productivity growth rates to enable decoupling, we may identify several other reasons for caution regarding the feasibility of growth management approaches [59]. We discuss these under the headings of rebound effects, environmental effects of services, limited potential of recycling, problem shifting, and non-green technological change. Each has relevance to the environmental impacts of tourism growth.

6.2. Rebound Effects

Rebound effects refer to a variety of behavioural and economic responses to an efficiency improvement that create a difference between the projected and the realised environmental outcomes of economic activity [65]. Increased efficiency of resource use typically results in a reduction in the price of the output, inducing consumption and associated emissions that may be even greater than the initial reduction in emissions from the technological improvement. In such cases, energy-efficient technological improvements are likely to be counterproductive.

Rebound effects may be direct, indirect, or economy-wide. Direct rebound effects occur when efficiency gains lead to additional consumption of the same product or service. Thus, efficiency improvements in aviation energy input or traffic control systems can result in lower-priced air travel, which, in turn, generates increased public demand for flights. As a result, the overall use of fossil fuels may be even greater after the application of energy-saving technological improvements in this sector [66,67]. Indirect rebound effects occur when the savings from technical efficiencies increase the purchasing power of consumers, resulting in increased demand for other goods and services that increases emissions output. Thus, the savings in fuel consumption resulting from purchase of an electric car may be used to fund a family flying holiday. Economy-wide rebound effects occur when, following a technical improvement, expenditure changes associated with changes in the consumption of complementary and substitute goods and services affect emissions in many different industries along various supply chains [65].

There is substantial evidence that, globally, rebound effects have either reduced or negated various environmental gains resulting from technological change [59]. Several empirical studies estimate large economy-wide rebound effects, suggesting that at least half of the potential energy savings from improved energy efficiency may be 'taken back' by various economic and behavioural responses affecting levels and patterns of consumption [65]. Despite their importance, studies of the rebound effects of changes in tourist consumption have been neglected in tourism research [16]. However, they are likely to be substantial, given the typically high income elasticities of demand associated with many tourism products and services [58].

6.3. Environmental Effects of Services

A major source of optimism for the decoupling of growth and environmental pressures lies in 'tertiarisation', or the shift from extractive and manufacturing industries to service sectors. This optimism is shared by increasing numbers of both growth management and heterodox tourism researchers [14]. However, any overall dematerialisation resulting from a shift to more services is more complex than may be thought. Many types of services cannot be created without raw material extraction, energy provision, transportation, and the building of infrastructure, all of which are tightly coupled with environmental pressures. A study of 217 countries over the 1991–2017 period concluded that tertiaryisation does not lead to absolute carbon dematerialisation—accounting for all indirect uses of energy, the service sector is actually as energy-intensive as manufacturing [68]. There is no historical evidence that switching to services reduces the material throughput of destinations that host a growing service sector [62].

Within tourism, certain sectors simply cannot be dematerialised to any significant extent—for example, agricultural services (e.g., gastronomic and wine tourism) and transportation services (e.g., aviation, cruising), which are high-emission sectors with high use of materials and energy. The development of new types of services often generates other pollutants instead of substituting for them. Tourism- and hospitality-related services also are often anchored in specific fixed-capital material spaces (e.g., hotels, education facilities, airports, theme parks), with construction, operation, and maintenance requiring materials and energy. Tourism also relies increasingly on the digital world, with its development of ‘smart tourism’ and substantial ICT infrastructure [26]. However, it is estimated that, by 2030, ICT could consume up to 51% of global electricity, contributing up to 23% of global greenhouse gas emissions [69].

6.4. Limited Potential of Recycling

Recycling is a strategy that is commonly advocated to reduce emissions associated with economic growth. Arguments have been advanced, listing the additional opportunities for decoupling that are afforded by increased rates of recycling [14,18], given that global recycling rates are relatively low [36]. However, the process of recycling itself necessitates energy, often requiring new materials, which also need to be recycled at some point, requiring more energy and new materials. There is also evidence that recycling is limited in its ability to provide resources to support economic growth [59]. From an engineering perspective, product recycling is really ‘down-cycling’—in each cycle, some matter is lost or degraded, reflecting the process of increasing entropy [21]. Recycling is explicitly supported by tourism researchers in general, despite limited empirical study of its energy requirements.

6.5. Problem Shifting

Technological solutions to particular environmental problems can create new ones and/or exacerbate others. While society may support the shift to electric rental vehicles, the production of batteries for electric cars requires resource inputs including lithium, cobalt, nickel, and manganese, which are essential energy-intensive inputs to many other green technologies [59]. A greater demand for such scarce inputs will put upward pressure on input and output prices in general. The production of biofuel for aviation creates competition over land use and its conservation. A necessary condition for successful decoupling is that interdependencies be recognised and that efforts to solve one environmental problem should avoid creating new ones and/or exacerbating others. This highlights the need for economy-wide perspectives that account for various types of impact and resource use [60].

6.6. Non-Green Technological Change

Technological advances often do not target specific resources that generate emissions associated with growth, or they are not ‘disruptive’ or ‘creatively destructive’ enough given their failure to displace existing highly polluting technologies. Thus, for example, the wide availability of service stations gives an infrastructural advantage to petrol-based cars, to the disadvantage of electric vehicles, which would require new supporting infrastructure [21]. In such circumstances, the type and extent of existing infrastructure ‘locks-in’ greater levels of emissions associated with future economic growth. Business firms typically attempt to economise on the more expensive factors of production, regardless of green considerations [70]. Since labour and capital inputs are typically relatively more costly than natural resources, productivity growth tends to be based on labour-saving and capital-saving innovations, with limited relevance to green technology. In such circumstances, environmental degradation may be unaffected. This is particularly the case when such emissions are regarded as ‘externalities’ in production, beyond the responsibilities of the polluting firm [8,24].

Taken together, these arguments undermine the basis for optimism that the decoupling of tourism growth from natural resource use will allow tourism-led economic growth to

occur without a rise in environmental pressures. Since there is no evidence that decoupling is or will happen rapidly enough to reverse adverse environmental effects such as global warming and climate change, an increasing number of critics see decoupling as a heroic assumption to save growth management approaches at the expense of inevitable environmental deterioration over time [16,21,54].

Importantly, the above arguments do not imply that efficiency improvements in tourism (or any other industry) are unnecessary. However, policymakers will need to move beyond business as usual and misplaced optimism regarding the power of decoupling. The degrowth response to the decoupling challenge is to reduce global economic activity, downsizing associated material and energy flows, while respecting planetary ecological boundaries [23,59]. The challenges of decoupling imply that more attention should be given to the development of types of tourism that eschew economic growth as the path towards industry profitability and social and environmental sustainability [60]. Strategies aiming to increase *efficiency* in tourism production must be complemented by the pursuit of *sufficiency* in consumption. While increasing numbers of heterodox tourism scholars reject the growth ethic responsible for ‘overtourism’ [17], with some notable exceptions [16,19–21,23,71], degrowth has been almost totally ignored as a viable alternative vision for tourism development. We next consider the degrowth option.

7. The Degrowth Alternative

Degrowth is regarded as a democratically driven, equitable downscaling of the throughputs of materials and energy that eventually results in a sustainable steady state [72–74]. The degrowth approach argues the case for a planned, gradual, and equitable ‘downscaling’ or ‘rightsizing’ of production and consumption in the global economy to achieve a better balance between resource use and supply, respect and embrace biophysical limits, and redistribute wealth and income globally to enhance the social wellbeing of the present and future generations [75]. While differences in emphasis exist among researchers, their shared vision comprises the following features, as listed in Table 1 [49,73,76,77]:

Table 1. Key elements of the degrowth approach.

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- Reducing the physical scale of the energy and material throughputs of the economy, consistent with environmental limits imposed by the Earth’s regenerative and assimilative capacities, equitably distributed between nations.
 - Voluntary transition towards a just, participatory, and ecologically sustainable society based on principles of sufficiency, sharing, simplicity, conviviality, equality, and care.
 - Planned reduction in economic activity, accompanied by strategies that support sociocultural flourishing and thriving.
 - Emphasis on quality of life rather than quantity of consumption.
 - Fulfilment of basic human needs for all.
 - Institutional and political change based on a range of diverse individual and collective actions and policies that facilitate civic engagement.
 - Emphasising locally determined poverty reduction paths rather than externally imposed development policies.
 - Substantially reduced dependence on economic activity to enhance social wellbeing, with increases in work-sharing, leisure time, sense of community, and physical and economic security.
 - Encouragement of community values such as self-reflection, balance, creativity, flexibility, diversity, good citizenship, generosity, and non-materialism.
 - Adherence to the principles of equity, participatory democracy, respect for human rights, and respect for cultural differences.
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The concept of degrowth has recently emerged as an alternative economic and social theory or conceptual framework that offers a critical perspective on wealth and wellbeing, in order to counter the common belief that increase of production and consumption invariably increases happiness or social well-being [77]. According to the degrowth approach, sustainable development in the short and long term can only be achieved through a gradual

and equitable downscaling of production and consumption that improves environmental conditions and well-being at the local and global level [73]. Degrowthers advocate the construction of a society that lives better with less. Importantly, degrowth is not taken to be an end in itself but a transition to a sustainable steady state at a scale that can exist over the long-term within Earth's carrying capacity [78]. Once the size of the economy adjusts to ecological limits, the goal is a steady state economy or zero economic growth, with a relatively stable level and pattern of consumption.

The degrowth movement is eclectic and evolving, embracing a broad range of theoretical and practical viewpoints that are generating ongoing debate. A large number of specific microeconomic and macroeconomic policies and institutional changes have been proposed as part of the degrowth policy mix [22,73]. Policy prescriptions include the implementation of green taxation, combined with redistributive taxation policies, extraction limits, carbon rationing, regulations to reduce material and energy throughputs, recycling, new social security guarantees, adjustments to work–life balance, promoting attitudinal and behavioural changes to reduce levels and patterns of consumption activity, and facilitative changes to economic, social, and political institutions [72,73,76,77]. Clearly, some components of the degrowth vision and action agenda will be easier to implement than others. Many of these policy prescriptions and the propositions listed in Table 1 are advocated by heterodox tourism scholars seeking alternative directions for tourism development [14,17,18]. For our present purposes, the important question concerns the implications of adopting degrowth policies for tourism development. The following section lists the major options for degrowing the economy, highlighting challenges for tourism degrowth.

8. Implications for Tourism

Policies for degrowing the economy can be classified under several broad headings, including GDP degrowth, consumption degrowth, work-time degrowth, and physical degrowth [79]. To enable these strategies will require changes to the mixed capitalist system that characterises most economies world-wide [53].

8.1. GDP Degrowth

The degrowth approach is inevitably associated with a reduction in GDP, which opens it to criticism from pro-growth advocates who emphasise the *material benefits* to society associated with GDP growth. The approach does not seek to reduce GDP *per se*, but rather to reduce material and energy throughputs. Countering the claim that a decline in GDP diminishes overall resident wellbeing, degrowthers accept Easterlin's findings that GDP *per capita* does not imply additional happiness above certain levels of satisfaction of basic material needs [33]. Sources of human wellbeing comprise intangible quality-of-life components as well as material living standards [24,80–82]. The degrowth literature encourages a focus on immaterial sources of wellbeing relating to opportunities for flourishing lives measured by new notions of individual and social prosperity [74,77]. Unfortunately, the mounting evidence that changes in GDP do not necessarily imply changes in quality of life, social progress, human development, or happiness continues to be relatively ignored in the tourism literature, particularly in tourism economics [24,83]. In the absence of targeted degrowth strategies, GDP degrowth may result in reduced investments in cleaner technologies, renewable energy, and related research, along with increased future CO₂ emissions [79]. What is important is that degrowth occurs in a socially and environmentally sustainable way [84,85]. Acknowledging that a cross-sector effort to reduce GDP rapidly could cause a cascade of adverse economic and social effects [86], the preferred degrowth strategy is a focused, effective, and efficient approach to GDP reduction in order to diminish environmental pressure, with the evolution of alternative economic and social practices that are viable outside of the growth economy. Alternative indicators are being developed involving either replacing, adjusting, or extending the GDP measure [24,27], which can help to assess different degrowth strategies.

8.2. Consumption Degrowth

Since the level of consumption determines the total environmental and social impacts, the degrowth approach emphasises the need to reduce aggregate consumption, rather than an attempt to ‘green’ it [30]. Substantial reductions in emissions to reduce the environmental impact of the average household sufficiently will require sizeable changes in consumption levels and patterns [4]. Proponents of degrowth argue the need for developed countries in particular to reduce their consumption levels of ‘non-necessary’ goods and services—a process that raises ethical issues [49,84]. A general problem with focusing directly on consumption degrowth is that it may activate a rebound mechanism, whereby reduced consumption of certain types of goods and services results in increased consumption of other types of consumables, even without changes in disposable income. Alternatively, it may lead to additional savings, resulting in more funds being available for borrowing, spending, and investing in other types of goods and services [30,79].

To some extent, the propensity to consume certain types of goods and services can be influenced by demarketing campaigns promoting consumption behaviour that is consistent with sustainable development [67]. Such campaigns will need to be complemented by education and awareness-raising on a substantial scale for every destination if rebound effects are to be minimised. Whatever the target of a particular demarketing campaign, power plays will result as many organisations seek to defend the *status quo*. Demarketing is unlikely to be effective over time in the absence of substantial changes in consumer values [67].

If reduced consumption is expected to improve environmental quality, locally or globally, mechanisms must be put in place to estimate the balance of benefits and costs associated with different quantities and qualities of emissions associated with the production of different consumables. Interestingly, many heterodox tourism researchers eschew price-setting on the grounds that tourist experiences should not be ‘commodified’ [14]. While shadow pricing to value externalities associated with production and consumption presents its challenges, it is not clear how meaningful decisions on resource allocation can be made in its absence [79,80,87]. Rights-based solutions favoured by several heterodox tourism theorists [14,19] will not inform the required decision-making as to the net costs or benefits associated with those goods and services that are targeted to decline in consumption and, hence, production. Government can play a useful role here, given that individuals lack the necessary information to make decisions regarding the carbon footprints of alternative consumption choices. Business firms can also play an important role. New business models propose positive sociocultural and environmental change as an organisational objective, via the creation of mutually beneficial relationships with all stakeholders [7,88]. The formulation and implementation of suitable business mission statements can go a long way to alter firms’ production strategies away from many of the ‘frivolous’ types of goods and services that characterise present-day consumption levels and patterns, including tourism consumption [89].

The degrowth approach supports the view that the production and consumption of goods and services should become more ‘localised’ to promote sustainable livelihoods and community wellbeing [73]—a view shared by some heterodox tourism scholars who extend the argument to support a switch away from international tourism toward greater domestic tourism [14,19]. It needs to be noted, however, that expenditure by domestic tourists simply involves a transfer of expenditure between regions within a destination. This makes for a lower economic contribution from domestic tourism than from international tourism, since the latter involves an injection of new money into the destination, with greater subsequent multiplier effects [58]. In many regional destinations, regardless of any community attempts at new product development, a switch to domestic tourism away from international visitation would be disastrous for local providers of tourism services, reducing material wellbeing [10]. One cannot simply assume that small-scale tourism developments will deliver increased net economic benefits to local communities, nor does this guarantee control over resources. These considerations reinforce the need to carefully

assess the opportunity costs of alternative tourism development proposals as part of any degrowth strategy.

Ultimately, what counts is the impact of reduced consumption on resident wellbeing [82,83,90]. Empirical research reveals that the effect of a decrease in consumption on wellbeing depends not only on the absolute size of this decrease, but also on people's aspirations, and on how strongly the social fabric 'primes' them to emphasise material wellbeing rather than the other dimensions of quality of life, such as social connections, work–life balance, health status, civic engagement, environmental quality, personal security, and so on [91]. For such reasons, proponents of degrowth suggest that nothing less than a deontological shift in human values is required to change current consumption patterns, methods, and lifestyles [73]. Heterodox tourism researchers have identified various values that can substitute for the 'consumerism' that characterises destinations worldwide. These include conviviality, ecocentrism, caring, empathy, and harmony with nature [14,17–19]. The problem, of course, is that the construction of wishlists of ideal human values does not make them so. In most cultures worldwide, social status, happiness, wellbeing, and identity are linked to consumption [49], alongside the strong human instincts of greed, selfishness, aggression, envy, and competition [79]. Until these types of ideal values replacing 'consumerism' gain strength throughout the populations of every destination, societies will need some objective means of selecting those goods and services to experience reduced consumption.

8.3. Work-Time Degrowth

Working time drives income and, thence, consumption, which is the strongest determinant of global environmental impacts [30]. In recent years, growth in productivity has led to the production of more goods and services rather than to reduced working hours [22]. An alternative strategy is to use gains in labour productivity to increase leisure time [49]. Reductions in working hours are included in all major degrowth scenarios and supported by heterodox tourism scholars [19]. This can be achieved by using productivity gains from technological development to expand leisure time instead of expanding economic outputs, providing more time and opportunities to support the intangible things that people value, such as supportive relationships, community involvement, physical activity, volunteering, skills enhancement, etc. [77]. Complementary strategies include work-sharing and redistribution of income and wealth through suitable taxation policies, basic income and job guarantees, and setting of minimum and maximum income levels.

While average annual salaries will inevitably decline alongside reduced working hours, findings suggest that the extent of the overall negative effect on wellbeing may well be exaggerated [33]. Degrowthers also emphasise the potential contributions to quality of life associated with increased leisure time for social, recreational, and life-fulfilling activities, particularly given growing dissatisfaction with work-centred lifestyles [77]. Of course, working less will not make everyone happier. Employment provides workers with opportunities to acquire skills, form friendships, integrate into the community, forge an identity, and achieve self-realisation [92]. Any reduction in working hours for particular tourism occupations would need to take such factors into account [79].

8.4. Physical Degrowth

Sustainable degrowth does not imply across-the-board degrowth. As noted above, the approach requires 'selective degrowth', whereby policy decisions are made democratically about which sectors of the economy need to degrow and which ones should be expanded [73,93]. Emphasis is placed on the scaling down of ecologically destructive and socially less necessary production, while sectors such as renewable energy should be prioritised for growth, alongside socially important sectors such as education and health services. Despite their historic low productivity, these sectors are more labour-intensive and provide employment with high social value within the degrown economy [49,94]. This is

consistent with heterodox critics' arguments on behalf of a smaller, more localised tourism industry that is more environmentally benign and fosters improved social relations [14,19].

While it is relatively easy to point to industries that are presently damaging the environment, there may well be debate over the necessity for products such as jet skis, private vehicles, and services such as advertising and gambling [95], each of which relates to tourism. The tourism industry, particularly in its reliance on energy-inefficient aviation, is arguably one of those 'unnecessary' activities, especially as evidence accumulates that its contribution to human wellbeing is overrated [19].

8.5. A Need for Radical Change?

Unlike the policy recommendations of growth management approaches that do little to address the fundamental causes of the socioecological crises facing destinations and their systems of social provisioning, the degrowth approach offers a vision for the radical transformation of society [96]. However, substantial debate exists regarding the means of transitioning from growth to degrowth and the types of changes required. While some degrowthers are optimistic regarding the prospects for a 'smooth transition' to a society of tourism degrowth [1], others argue that the transition requires post-capitalist forms of production, consumption, and exchange, with a fundamental reorientation of the market system, producer and consumer values, work practices, financial systems, human relationships, livelihood practices, the nature of ownership, and the broader social culture [6,97,98]. Each element of the required transition obviously poses formidable challenges in implementation. What degrowth approaches lack is an overall theory of how such radical political proposals may be implemented in the actual world of self-interested policymakers, captured by vested interests. Analysis of the specific types of economic, political, and social changes needed to support the degrowth approach lies beyond the scope of this paper.

A common concern about degrowth is that drastic and rapid changes to the economy will result in unintended social and economic chaos and instability [10,79]. Degrowthers agree that a preferable, much less risky strategy would be a type of 'piecemeal revolution' or 'stepwise development' involving the reform of current institutions to create the conditions for social transformation respecting both top-down and bottom-up contributions to policy. In this way, degrowth can proceed at a slower, more acceptable pace. To date, little formal or empirical work has been undertaken to estimate the likely outcomes of rejecting business as usual and the advantages or disadvantages of alternative policy outcomes to take tourism in other directions [99].

9. Future Research

An alternative paradigm, such as the degrowth approach, requires various enabling conditions to ensure its effectiveness and viability. The degrowth alternative presents both challenges and opportunities to reframe core assumptions and develop new directions in tourism theory, practice, and research [22,100]. The degrowth research agenda is essentially inter- and multidisciplinary, requiring the collaboration of scholars within and between both the natural and social sciences. Both pro- and anti-growth tourism researchers have the opportunity to critically analyse the key concepts of the degrowth approach, understand the different perspectives offered, and debate the implications of putting these ideas into practice [98]. While there is insufficient space to address these in detail, some important research areas relevant to tourism degrowth theory and practice may be identified. These research areas relate to the nature of tourism, the consumption problem, localism and downsizing, effects on resident wellbeing, business degrowth, choice of policy mix, and the institutional changes required.

9.1. The Nature of Tourism

Rejecting the conceptualisation of tourism as a profit-seeking business activity alongside other growth-oriented 'industries', heterodox theorists argue that successful degrowth

of the tourism industry, both locally and globally, requires a redefinition/refocus of the nature of tourism as a human endeavour that contributes to human wellbeing [14,19]. *Inter alia*, this implies shifting tourism away from its excessive commodification and exploitation of sociocultural and natural assets, towards greater appreciation of the opportunities for transformative experiences. This implies reimagining the relationships among tourism stakeholders, a radical rethinking of the right to travel, recognition of the rights of local communities and the importance of their spaces, cultures, and identities, the forging of meaningful connections and understanding between hosts and guests, supporting the long-term renewal and flourishing of socioecological systems, and explicit recognition of the potential transformative function of tourism experiences [17,18,101].

The tourism industry may have unique characteristics that will fashion the types of industry degrowth strategies employed. In this respect, the tourism degrowth approach has much to learn from the heterodox tourism literature with respect to the nature and purpose of tourism activity. While particular issues may well be debated, the critical literature reminds proponents of the degrowth approach of the importance of discouraging certain types of developments and behaviours and supporting new ones in tourism planning and development that are holistic, participatory, and socially and environmentally mindful [19]. Further research is needed to identify commonalities and differences between different heterodox approaches to tourism development, as they might affect the formulation and implementation of degrowth strategies. Specific obstacles and complexities of transitioning from growth-oriented policies to degrowth-oriented policies in the tourism context need to be identified.

9.2. The Consumption Problem

More research is required regarding the most effective change strategies to facilitate new socially and environmentally benign modes of consumer behaviour, incorporating notions such as concern, responsibility, and sufficiency. Research is needed into the types of goods and services that, given their contribution to wellbeing, should be prioritised in production and consumption, along with those types of goods and services that have minimal or even negative effects on wellbeing. Research is also needed into types of strategies to bring about widespread shifts in the consumption behaviour of the various tourism stakeholders. What types of support mechanisms are required to maintain economic and social stability during the transition to reduced and changed aggregate consumption? What effects will materially downshifted consumer lifestyles have on social institutions, values, norms, and governance? What are the barriers to adopting lifestyle changes across whole societies, and how can they be overcome? What lessons can be learned from indigenous and pre-industrial societies regarding living without growth, including change towards more vegetarian diets? [22,30]. The nature and extent of rebound effects that restrict the environmental gains from reduced consumption of particular goods and services also need much more attention in tourism research. Modelling efforts should extend to estimating direct, indirect, and economy-wide rebound effects of changes in consumption using computable general equilibrium analysis [102]. More attention also needs to be given to the tension arising between a smaller tourism sector and the touted benefits of tourism to provide 'transformative' experiences to the traveller [17,18].

A greater understanding of effective and efficient processes to change tourism-related consumption behaviour may be expected as the research efforts progress. Given the different values and objectives of the various types of tourism stakeholders, tailored approaches to reduce consumption will need to be applied to each group. On the supply side, reducing tourism consumption can be supported by new product developments aimed at enhancing consumers' non-material wellbeing.

The degrowth approach presents tourism researchers with opportunities to explore the descriptive, explanatory, and predictive ability of models that replace *Homo economicus* with *Homo felix* [84], a more realistic decision-making agent comprising a mix of characteristics such as selfishness, greed, status consciousness, hedonism, altruism, caring, justice, and

environmental concern. In terms of model development to determine the effects of changed volumes and patterns of consumption, tourism economists can play an important role. Loss aversion theory, affirming that adaptation to loss is likely to be less successful than adaptation to gain, implies that reduced consumption opportunities may negatively impact social wellbeing [84]. More research is needed as to the relevance of such findings to the outcomes of tourism degrowth.

Changes in consumption required by degrowth apply to tourists as well as to residents. Increasing attention is being given to identifying the characteristics of the 'ideal tourist'. 'Ideal tourists' are characterised by attributes such as 'high spending', 'caring', 'involved', 'convivial', 'culturally sensitive', 'responsible', 'environmentally aware', and 'seeking meaningful social encounters', behaving in socially and environmentally beneficial ways [89]. Planned well, and designed with consumption degrowth in mind, new destinations could 'pull' the right mix of visitors to contribute to local or national wellbeing goals, rather than an emphasis on aggregate visitor numbers or expenditure injection [8]. Further study of the ideal tourist becomes even more of an imperative when the tourism industry is increasingly required to justify the benefits it generates [19,70].

9.3. Localism and Downsizing

Latouche uses the term 'conviviality' to describe a slower, more localised society within which destination residents experience an enriched culture at a much lower level of consumption [73]. Heterodox scholars have argued for a shift in tourism activity away from pro-growth models emphasising the contributions of inbound tourism, towards more sustainable and beneficial forms of tourism based on domestic visitation, claiming that the latter better promotes sustainable livelihoods, income equality, community engagement, and wellbeing [14,19,73]. While having appeal, this scenario is problematic regarding geographically smaller destinations (e.g., small island destinations) that are hugely reliant on international visitation, and wherein domestic tourism is more akin to day-tripping. More research is required on the effects of localisation in different destination contexts with respect to their geographic size and structure.

An underlying assumption of the localisation proposal seems to be that local communities are invariably losers from forms of tourism involving international ownership. The issues are far more complex, however, with net benefits to communities being very much dependent on the sourcing of inputs to production rather than ownership, as well as the paths of income distribution to key stakeholders. While it may be readily agreed that communities should decide what they really need, do local communities (and tourists) always prefer small-scale tourism with its promise of more meaningful intercultural exchange? Really? At what cost to different stakeholders? As noted above, domestic tourism is likely to generate much lower income and employment to communities than international tourism. Do local communities always opt for the protection of natural resources above economic rewards? Historically, this clearly has not been the case. Material benefits do count and may dominate community expectations regarding tourism development [10]. Are tourists interested in being educated about local cultures, the destination, its history and languages, and prospects of engaging with locals? Many (most?) travellers would not find this type of tourism to be appealing in any way (in which case it would certainly facilitate industry degrowth!). The issues involved require more extensive research, particularly in terms of estimating material benefits foregone in the development of community-based small-scale tourism.

In much of the argumentation supporting localisation, non-material (i.e., quality of life) wellbeing outcomes seem to be implicitly favoured as somehow more 'authentic' or 'relevant' than material (i.e., economic) wellbeing outcomes [14]. Each of the above questions flags the need for additional case studies and further research to provide informed answers, particularly with respect to the required trade-offs between material and non-material benefits that communities must make in developing alternative forms of tourism.

9.4. Effects on Resident Wellbeing

A key research issue concerns the conditions required to maintain or improve human wellbeing both in the degrowth phase of tourism and post-growth in the long term, along with the types of institutions that can enable this [84]. Resident wellbeing outcomes associated with tourism activity provide policymakers with richer information for decision-making than standard performance measures [103,104]. Human wellbeing derives from more diverse sources than economic production and material living standards. There is now a well-established case for looking 'beyond GDP', using wellbeing metrics in the policy process, and assessing economic growth in terms of its impact on people's wellbeing and on societies' standard of living [24]. The predicted impacts of tourism degrowth can be filtered through a lens constructed from an established wellbeing framework to identify and measure the intra- and intergenerational effects on resident wellbeing [81,82,90]. The employment of a wellbeing lens is consistent with a community-based approach to tourism degrowth, helping to foster public debate and engagement to ensure meaningful citizen participation in the degrowth process.

Since changes in the quality and quantity of economic, human, social, and natural capital stocks affect the potential wellbeing outcomes of tourism activity for both present and future generations, the links between any decline in the quantity and quality of capital stocks resulting from degrowth and resident wellbeing outcomes must also be identified [80]. Further research is required to determine potential gainers and losers in the process of degrowth, with particular attention to those who are already marginalised in terms of geography, gender, race, class, and caste [105]. Further research is needed as to the impact of shorter working hours on tourism employment in general and tourism worker wellbeing in particular, along with the challenges associated with the transition to reduced working hours.

Wellbeing outcomes are also crucially important to determining the tourism industry's success in achieving the SDGs [90]. At present, there is little understanding of the various ways in which degrowth affects subjective and objective wellbeing or intra- and intergenerational wellbeing.

9.5. Business Degrowth

The role of the business sector in the tourism degrowth approach has been relatively neglected to date. Business operators comprise a stakeholder group that may, in general, be expected to oppose degrowth or at least be lukewarm in their support for it, especially in the short term. The transition to degrowth will require the construction, adoption, and implementation of innovative business models that facilitate industry contributions to societal wellbeing and ecological restoration. New business models are being developed based on sharing, cooperation, communities, and localised economies, rather than competition [88,106], but to date there has been little effort to address appropriate models for business degrowth. Regarding the aforementioned strategy of reducing average working hours, more empirical studies are needed to better understand the importance of employment and the role of labour markets in a post-growth world, including how much work supports an individual to lead a flourishing life. Work time degrowth, reducing both the push (i.e., production capacity) and pull (i.e., spending power) factors of consumption growth, strongly complements direct targeting of the quantity of consumption and comprises an important strategy for degrowth. While afforded some attention in the heterodox tourism literature [14,19], its potential effects are yet to be studied in detail.

9.6. Policy Mix

Degrowth strategies remain fragmented and diverse, with no detailed framework of analysis or agenda for implementation and timing. Tourism researchers need to undertake research on intervention techniques to bring about degrowth, distinguishing between the different contexts of developed and developing destinations [22]. The implications of degrowth strategy types for destinations at different levels of economic, social, and political

development represent an important area for future research [107]. Clearly, it would be unreasonable to expect a 'one size fits all' degrowth strategy to apply universally.

Researchers can identify and measure the economic, social, and environmental impacts resulting from the tourism industry's adoption of various strategies that have been proposed in the wider degrowth literature. Tourism researchers can thus study the effects of green taxation combined with redistributive taxation policies, extraction limits, carbon rationing, regulations to reduce material and energy throughputs, recycling, working time reductions, new social security guarantees, and bans on certain types of products and services [85]. Standard pro-environmental 'reformist' economic measures are insufficient because they ignore the root causes of much environmental degradation [85]. The emerging field of ecological macroeconomics is identifying challenges and practical proposals to drive prosperity without growth [49,77]. Analysing the impact of such policies in the context of degrowth can help the development of industry-specific policies and tools for the practical implementation of the tourism degrowth agenda.

9.7. Institutional Changes Required

Serious pursuit of degrowth at both the global and destination levels requires substantial transformation of the tourism industry and its metabolism [22,53]. There is no consensus concerning what strategies are needed to replace the current social and political institutions, or what form any new institutions will take. Thus far, no research on tourism governance has systematically explored the implications for institutional change of degrowth in tourism [6]. Researchers need to ask what a degrown tourism industry looks like? [71]. Tourism's embeddedness in the prevailing growth management paradigm suggests the need to apply insights from institutional economics on the ways that institutions operate, change, and become locked in to path-dependent trajectories. Since tourism degrowth will both affect and be affected by changes in other industries, the tourism degrowth research efforts will need to extend beyond the boundaries of the tourism industry. More attention is needed to identify those institutions that can support or impede degrowth, as well as how the degrowth ethic can become institutionalised in public- and private-sector plans and policies. To adequately address the practical challenges and feasibility of enabling degrowth, particularly in complex systems such as sectors of the global economy, researchers need to explore ways of reinforcing new behaviours and discouraging older ones associated with high negative externalities [108]. More research needs to be undertaken as to how tourism degrowth can contribute to an overarching, economy-wide process of industry contraction and planned convergence [6,53].

Policy proposals for the governance of degrowth have been developed [107], but these demand further study in application to tourism. In particular, how can participatory approaches involving a complete range of stakeholder groups become better embedded into the formulation of tourism policy? [6,22,53]. The research effort could also address how the global economy, trade relationships, and international cooperation might be affected by the degrowth paradigm. Thus far, no research on tourism governance has systematically explored the implications for institutional change posed by degrowth in tourism [6]. It is argued that more radical efforts are needed to cultivate post-capitalist 'spaces of hope' in tourism provision that decommodify leisure, creating improved opportunities for humans to thrive and flourish [6,84]. A substantial research effort will be required to explore the implications of this notion for the implementation and practice of tourism degrowth. Researchers have proposed the diverse economies framework as a promising initial step for designing tourism industries in the future [108,109]. Whatever the types of structures that evolve, it is essential that grassroots-level public input as to preferred futures is encouraged, respected, and actioned. In this respect, tourism degrowth strategists can learn from heterodox theorists seeking new ways of organising societies to improve resident wellbeing.

Given the changing perceptions of the nature of tourism theory and practice, tourism degrowth also implies changes in tourism education to promote a better understanding of

the social structures underpinning pro-growth attitudes and the resultant environmental problems [85]. Researchers can access an emerging body of literature on pedagogies that aid in the critical examination of tourism systems to advance sustainability [108,110], but further research is required to link educational change specifically to a tourism industry that rejects growth as a performance indicator.

Irrespective of the types of transformations that are favoured by degrowthers, there will inevitably be pushback from those who gain from business-as-usual approaches to industrial development [96]. This would include many stakeholders in the tourism industry [70]. Any serious transformation away from a growth management approach will need to confront a set of national and international organisations that are ideologically committed to economic growth and integrally linked to business interests [6,96]. Research is needed to advance our understanding of the different types of barriers to tourism degrowth and how each of them might be overcome [14,19,20,22]. Confronting these barriers requires the involvement, engagement, and participation of all stakeholder groups, and at all levels of government. This research effort will ideally need to involve case studies of particular destinations, since each region needs to find its own alternatives to development, tailored to its own cultural and ecological characteristics [77]. While some examples of degrowth have been offered by tourism researchers, these have focused on local initiatives rather than on destination-wide efforts for planned degrowth [14,19].

However, initiatives to reduce barriers to applying wellbeing measures, and to enhance destinations' capacity to incorporate wellbeing measures into policymaking, are unlikely to be successful unless driven by a transformative shift in values away from neoliberal thinking. While many regard the continuance of capitalism as inconsistent with the aims and suggested strategies of the degrowth approach [6], this is still an open question [111].

These and many more topics will form the research agenda of the degrowth approach. More detailed understanding is required of each of the agenda items and their implications for policy interventions to achieve degrowth. Degrowth challenges the notion of a single path to development, acknowledging a diversity of valid pathways. Future research could include exploring the potential for hybrid approaches that combine elements of degrowth with other sustainability strategies. The attractiveness of the degrowth research agenda comes from its power to draw from and articulate different sources and streams of thought that are relevant to conceptual progress and policy prescription.

10. Conclusions

Proponents of the dominant 'growth management' view claim that tourism's adverse environmental effects can be resolved by ongoing 'decoupling' of economic growth from resource use through more efficient management of tourism development, supported by improvements in technology. The solutions proposed, however, are often merely marginal interventions reflecting the standard policy mix of the neoliberal pro-growth ethic, which limits their effectiveness. Many tourism researchers have ignored the relevance of the decoupling challenge, while others have (implicitly) adopted views that assume that it can be successfully undertaken given sufficient willingness by tourism stakeholders to undertake the necessary efficiency-enabling actions. However, the real-world barriers to decoupling have consequences for the validity of both the growth management approach and some heterodox approaches to tourism development. Given the biophysical limitations associated with decoupling, pro-growth management approaches will inevitably fail over the longer term. Degrowth seems to be the only way to permanently address the decoupling challenge.

This paper articulates the nature of 'degrowth' and the types of policies that can support a degrowth strategy for the tourism industry. Substantial obstacles must be faced if the degrowth approach is to be successfully implemented in the tourism industry. Ultimately, the success of a degrowth strategy for tourism will depend on its improvement of residents' wellbeing outcomes. This requires estimates of the wellbeing outcomes associated with alternative degrowth strategies, including research relating to the social, environmental,

and institutional changes required to decouple wellbeing and growth. Admittedly, many of the policy prescriptions associated with the degrowth action agenda, and particularly the lifestyle changes required to reduce consumption, appear to be impractical to implement at the present time.

The thesis of this paper is that the tourism degrowth option becomes obviously compelling once the myth of decoupling is exposed. To date, heterodox tourism researchers, rejecting the growth management approach to tourism development, have tended to focus more on articulating alternative types of tourism as opposed to detailed analysis of the implications of tourism degrowth. The research agenda proposed herein invites tourism scholars, public- and private-sector practitioners, and other interested stakeholders to assess the implications of the degrowth mindset for the redirection of the tourism industry in the future. Research in the areas identified above may be expected to clarify many of the challenges facing tourism degrowth and help to fashion strategies to reduce the adverse effects of tourism growth while enhancing resident wellbeing. In this endeavour, the ideas generated in the heterodox literature regarding the nature and purpose of tourism can inform a tourism degrowth agenda of research and practice. As these ideas become more mainstream, it may be expected that tourism degrowth will become the dominant paradigm among tourism scholars.

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