


Chapter 2

Tourism and Water: A Human Rights Perspective to Enhance Sustainable Tourism

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how acknowledging water as a human right affects government, business, and local communities in tourism. Tourism businesses have the responsibility to respect and protect the right to water, which aligns with the SDGs, particularly SDGs 5, 6, and 10. When the human right to water is not protected and respected, multifaceted violations occur and the potential for tourism to contribute to sustainable development will be undermined. The chapter suggests ways to improve tourism water management and prevent human rights abuses. By adopting responsible water management practices and engaging in partnerships with local communities, the tourism industry can help to promote the realization of the human right to water while also contributing to sustainable tourism.

INTRODUCTION

It is well documented that tourism is a “thirsty industry” regardless of the fact it is dwarfed by use in other sectors such as agriculture (Hadjidakou et al., 2012). In an entry of Encyclopedia of Tourism, Tirado Bennisar (2014) recorded factors that

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make tourism a significant water consumer. First, the consumptive uses provided by local supplies for numerous tourism activities and attractions such as swimming pools, golf courses, gardening/landscaping, meals, drinking, washing, and cleaning. Second, non-consumptive water use that is integral to the ecosystem, such as nature tourism activities (enjoying wildlife at beaches, and a variety of water sports). Third, intermediating water use generated by tourism related products such as agriculture and migration related to tourism development. In addition, we must consider the climate disaster affecting the hydrogeology cycle that jeopardizes water availability, particularly in semi-arid and arid destinations (Kiper et al., 2022).

As a result of high and unsustainable water consumption, tourism activities are negatively impacting the environment and human beings, particularly local people, through water depletion, water pollution and social conflicts (Cole & Browne, 2015; Epler-Wood, 2017; Strauß, 2011). However, securing water for the tourism industry is much more dominant in the literature (Cole et al., 2020). Taking a “tourism first” stance, how to manage the water supply for the tourism industry when their water security is threatened is most frequently investigated. Despite struggles in all continents, the community’s perspectives have been the subject of far fewer studies. Studies have suggested that private concessions have been used to guarantee the supply of water in tourist areas as a mechanism of accumulation and reproduction of capital (Hernández Peñaloza et al., 2017); such as in Bali, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Nicaragua where there has been rapid and unchecked growth of tourism at the expense of the environment. Commodification and privatization of the water supply when water is constrained is common in tourist destinations (Cole, 2017; Cole & Ferguson, 2015; Hof & Blázquez-Salom, 2015). Furthermore, weak governance, and lack of law enforcement, was evident in Bali, Costa Rica, and Yogyakarta (Cole, 2012; Cole & Ferguson, 2015; Sandang, 2022). These approaches, that treat water as a commodity, are likely to reinforce disparities between those who can afford to pay for water compared with those who find water prices prohibitive, and thus infringe the human rights to water, often of the most vulnerable.

Based on our previous work and literature, this chapter explores the multifaceted relationship between tourism and water through a human rights lens. Throughout the years of our research and activism, we have found that tourism activities raise serious concerns about the right to water for local communities, together with the sustainability of the environment. Because ultimately, tourists come and go but the community and environment remain in whatever state they are left (Cole & Browne, 2015). We believe that human rights principles must work as a guarantor for fulfilling basic rights and protections against abuses that arise from tourism activities. This argument is based on a firm understanding that the globalization of tourism has created governance gaps that require both states and tourism businesses to engage

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