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### **THE END OF TOURISM? Climate Change and Challenges**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Starting with the assumption that socio-cultural aspects of tourism demand will need to change in response to global warming, this paper identifies business and consumer contradictions that highlight the complexities of dealing with climate change in an industry characterized by fragmented, global supply chains. The paper's approach is to problematize the issues into a series of research questions (related to ethical consumption, sustainability, policies, actions and communication) based on the premise that sustainable tourism is possible and desirable but mitigation has to acknowledge the anthropogenic causes of climate change and responses should be underpinned by changing norms for any society that considers travel to be the 'perfect freedom'. **Keywords:** ubiquitous travel, climate change, global warming, peak experiences, hypermobility, democratized travel.

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## INTRODUCTION

The driving idea behind Fukuyama's 'End of History' is a manifestation of a rather larger form of endism: *fin de siècle* (or more accurately, *fin de millénaire*) in which postmodernism reflected with unnerving accuracy many aspects of the 19<sup>th</sup> century *belle epoch* characterised by "escapism, extreme aestheticism, world-weariness, and fashionable despair" (Aestheticism, 2008). Fukuyama's 'End of History' in its first outing was published in the spring of 1989 and reflected the wave of anti-communism that emerged in the US and to a lesser extent in Europe from Gorbachev's *glasnost* (reforms), the crumbling Soviet Empire, and the idea that 'the West' had somehow beaten 'the rest' (to borrow from Roger Scruton 2002). Fukuyama's short-lived version of endism was predicated on the idea that the 1980s had seen an unprecedented period wherein the 'old driving forces of ideology and beliefs across the board [were] subsumed into a global consensus based on Western liberalism' (Ryan, 1992, p. 6).

So what has this got to do with tourism? The answer lies in the analogy that can be drawn between how tourism is perceived, analysed, discussed, and portrayed as an essentially Western ideology and Fukuyama's central thesis 'the triumph of the Western idea. New waves of Chinese, Indian, African tourists all seem to be seeking what appear to be diversions, excursions, and difference away from home in forms similar to those whose territory tourism usually is: middle class whites from the developed world. At first glance it may seem that while some tourist behaviours might differ, the tourism process or system seems to be the same. In this sense Scruton's ironic description of history as 'just one damn thing after another' (Scruton, 2006, p. 2) can easily be subverted into 'just one damn destination after another'.

However, just as Fukuyama's work was found to be wanting in the sense that it was premised on the idea that there were no viable alternatives to Western liberal democracy, 'The End of Tourism' (i.e. present modalities and consumption patterns) associated, as they are, with freedom and consumption, cannot be sustained along either established lines, or what appears to be its trajectory of

unabated growth when the scientific evidence supporting its growing contribution to climate change is beyond reasonable doubt (Gossling, 2005).

While technology may provide solutions to the high levels of carbon emissions resulting from the tourism supply and consumption chain, the environmental problem is of such a scale that social norms, habits, practices, and assumptions about travel (especially leisure mobility) in its contemporary, ubiquitous form have to be challenged and changed if catastrophic consequences are to be avoided. Scott et al.'s (2006) review paper set out the arguments and literature on tourism and climate change and it reflected what seemed to be a cultural turn or tipping point for the general debate on climate change. Public opinion seemed to shift under the sheer weight of scientific evidence following the publication of the fourth report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2007a), the Stern Review (Stern, 2006), and in more popular format, as a response to Al Gore's 2006 award winning film 'An Inconvenient Truth'.

While the Stern Review and the IPCC (2007a) only mentions tourism in passing (in relation to aircraft emissions), certain aspects of climate change and tourism have been investigated. For example, research about tourists' and tourism experts' perceptions of climate change and tourism (Becken, 2004). The same period, 2006-2007 was characterized by significant news coverage in the popular media (Oxford Analytica, 2007) underpinned by a dramatic rise in scientific research into climate change and its causes (cf. Cox and Stephenson, 2007, Moser and Dilling, 2004). The science has been interrogated on behalf of tourism by a number of authors including Dubois (2005), Hall and Higham (2005), and Viner (2006) each of whom sought to contextualise tourism in the scientific debates about climate change. Even so, in the public arena, citizens remain somewhat cynical about government attempts to seize the green initiative, especially in the case of taxes that claim to incentivize desirable green behaviour but are not specifically hypothecated to mitigating carbon emissions problems (Lawson, 2006, Truger, 2002).

With the growing realization that virtually all powered human mobility causes carbon emissions, the role of tourism (and in particular flying) as a contributing

factor to global warming came into the spotlight. The comfortable democracy of cheap flights (Elliot 2003) brought about by air traffic deregulation, global tax breaks on aviation fuel, and heated competition was cast into doubt by negative publicity epitomized by the phrase 'binge flying' coined rather ironically by Mark Ellingham, founder of the Rough Guide travel book organization (Hill 2007). His basic premise is that the middle classes of the developed world are somehow addicted to carbon intensive leisure mobility:

The tobacco industry fouled up the world while denying [it] as much as possible for as long as they could...If the travel industry rosily goes ahead as it is doing, ignoring the effect that carbon emissions from flying are having on climate change, we are putting ourselves in a very similar position to the tobacco industry (Hill, 2007)

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) predicts huge growth between 2007 (900 million international visitor arrivals, UNWTO, 2007a) and 2020 with a forecasted 1.6 billion visitor arrivals (UNWTO, 2007b). The consumer mentality characterised by a desire for instant gratification, and hypermobility in the form of leisure travel (Peeters, 2006, 2007) bought about by a potent mix of hyperconsumption (Balch 1994, RITZER, XX) and postmodern ennui (Bauman 2001) fuelled by the longstanding 'forest of media' (Hughes, 1980) provides the backdrop for an ever changing, compelling range of travel product advertisements that has produced a series of contradictions that a) almost define modern living (Berman, 1982) and b) frame the public debate about tourism, mobility and climate change. It is such contradictions, arising from the eclectic range of literature, that form the thrust of this paper as it explores the socio-cultural aspects of carbon emissions and the need to shift to a 'low carbon economy' (Stern, 2007. p. 655).

The discussion is underpinned by four basic assumptions that emphasise the need for social scientists to be critically engaged with scientists, climatologists and meteorologists in developing insights into the cultural and behavioural changes needed to combat climate change. First, there are very clear links

between emissions generating activities, their impacts on the natural and human environment, economic development paths and the social milieu within which this all takes place (Urry, 2006). Second, the inference to be drawn from such social, economic and environmental interconnections is that business cannot be separated from society, politics or culture e.g. from the social and cultural factors leading to a tourism mobility demand (Wilk, 1996). Third, just as no one single technological fix or policy instrument can resolve climate change problems, a single sector (such as tourism) working in isolation cannot resolve such problems (Stern, 2007). Finally, given the amount of emission reduction required to reach climate stabilization, it is suggested that the key to reducing tourism-induced emissions is the emergence of a new culture of travel and new ways of achieving the 'peak experiences' (Maslow, n.d.) that are central to much of tourism.

When these four basic assumptions are located within the scientific knowledge about climate change (IPCC, 2007b, Perry, 2000, Viner, 2006), the need for action in terms of social behaviour becomes apparent: a view central to both the IPCC and Stern reports. Given the complexities and uncertainties of technological fixes, changes in human behaviour are central to reducing the root cause of the problem: high carbon lifestyles, a phrase that encapsulates the basis of the modern global tourism industry. Even so, Stern is sympathetic to the problems faced by particular industries:

The costs of mitigation will not be evenly distributed across industry sectors. Carbon-intensive sectors will face higher costs, and it is right to consider the impacts of these costs on their competitiveness. Similarly, the costs of unabated climate change will fall more heavily on sectors that depend upon environmental resources, such as agriculture and tourism (Stern, 2007, p. 652).

Given the enormity of the basic conundrum that high carbon lifestyles presently drive tourism businesses, industry investment in climate change mitigation actions will have to be seen as a business driver rather than an unwanted cost.

TOURISM, CLIMATE CHANGE AND 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY SOCIETY

In addition to the expected dimensions of mitigation and adaptation, the literature on climate change and tourism can be categorised in two other ways. First, those reporting case studies of climate change impact on specific regions and destinations. Typical examples are to be found in the work of Perry (2000, 2005) who, in the context of the Mediterranean, identifies the need to link future climate forecasting (notably increasingly hot summers) with the likely impact on tourists' behaviour and health. Burki *et al.* (2005) explore the case of the Swiss Alps and conclude, *inter alia*, that climate change may become more of an elite recreation as ski lifts in cheaper Swiss ski destination dismantle their equipment as a response to the lack of snow. Mountain tourism was the theme of papers by Richardson *et al.* (2003), and Scott (2003) at the first conference on climate change and tourism to be organized by the UNWTO and which led to the Djerba Declaration (UNWTO, 2003). In similar vein, Becken *et al.* (2007) report on the problems faced by small islands, work also undertaken by Belle *et al.* (2005). Gossling (2003) in an earlier work contextualized island-tourism studies within a political ecology perspective. Small islands also received attention from the Tyndall Centre (UK), which produced a practical guide (Tompkins, 2005). Wall (1998) also contributed to the impact of climate on specific types of location with his study on recreation activities in wetlands.

The second area of literature is specifically about tourism's contribution to climate change with a very early contribution by Perry (1972) and later research findings by Gossling (2005), and Simpson (2005). The research on climate change and tourism seems at once fragmented, in the sense that there is a plethora of one-off studies (mainly on adaptation) and at the same time closely clustered around a further way of categorising the research: by geographic type (such as mountains and small islands). Many of the papers stress the cross-border nature of tourism (i.e. the international aspect rather than global) and emphasize the need for cooperation among nation-states (a theme throughout Hall and Higham's edited book 2005). With metanarratives such as climate change, intergovernmental agencies, especially the family of United Nations organizations has important things to say.

For example, the Secretary General of the UNWTO, in his address to a climate and tourism conference made the following statement

Favourable climatic conditions at destinations are key attractions for tourists. It is especially true for beach destinations and the conventional sun-and-sea segment, which is still the dominating form of tourism. Tourists are attracted to the Mediterranean coasts and tropical islands by ample sunshine, warm temperatures and little precipitation, escaping from harsher weather conditions and seasons in their home countries (Frangialli 2005).

He went on to say that the same applied to 'other forms of tourism such as mountain tourism and winter sports.' While he is, of course right, such arguments that focus on climatic conditions of pleasure peripheries are at best circular and at worst cloud the issue by focusing on the dis-benefits to tourists rather than the potentially catastrophic effects on populations and livelihoods. If such ideas are linked to other UNWTO statements about the way in which tourism is integrated into the world economy (Koumelis, 2007, Heyer, 2007), the need to protect not only the immediate resources required such as reefs, rivers and landscapes, but the meta-resource of stable climatic conditions becomes imperative.

#### *Changing views about the growth in International tourist arrivals*

Economists have traditionally described tourism as a discretionary purchase, i.e. individual income not set aside for absolute necessities necessary items such as food and household bills. This was logical as post war economic, social and cultural changes took place in a recovering and growing global economy which quickly democratized travel in the US and Europe. But, in the present age of hypermobility, and as Urry observes the shift to, '...a more general 'mobile culture' stemming from a 'compulsion to mobility' (Urry 2003:2) normative economic definitions no longer suffice to describe the movement of people across borders. One authoritative source estimates predict that 4.5 billion air trips will be made in 2025 (ICAO 2007:5). The sustained growth in air travel (IATO 2007, IATA 2007) over the past decade suggests that demand (which for present

purposes, can also be termed ‘social behaviour’) shows little sign of slowing even in the full knowledge of environmental concerns.

The OECD Working Party on National Environmental Policy (2001: 36) summarizes this perspective in qualitative terms unusual for that organization:

Tourism decision-making, like consumption decisions in general, is rarely characterized by a rational ranking of options based on perfect information. Many tourists may be unaware of the full range of options available to them or, alternatively, may be aware of them yet make seemingly irrational decisions as emotions or other aspects of the psyche take the upper hand to logic. Oftentimes tourism consumer behavior is characterized by both of these phenomena simultaneously.

These data and the narrative from OECD demonstrate that travel is not simply the allocation of limited resources to a variety of commodities by rational consumers. Rather, demand seems to reflect the need for more intense experiences, reaction to information overload and a host of other ill-defined social phenomena of the developed world; in effect, Bauman’s ‘liquid modernity’ whereby life is lived at such a pace and under such intense media proliferation that society ‘change[s] faster than it takes the ways of acting [by members of society] to consolidate into habits and routines’ (2005:1). In an alternative sense, demand is also in response to the huge range of cheap travel opportunities bought about by increased wealth, inspired destination marketing and intense corporate competition (referred to in the present paper as ‘democratization of air travel’, Elliot 2003). Since the introduction of low-cost air carriers there has been an additional 30 million extra return seats provided by two carriers alone Easyjet and Ryanair). However, complexity arises as the lack of clarity or certainty as to whether this increase has resulted from more people travelling or a smaller group travelling more frequently (The Travel Foundation 2006).

Consumers may have to be motivated into thinking about ‘slow’ and local forms of tourism taking inspiration from the ‘slow food’ movement, (Slow Food



n.d.). ‘Slow tourism (if the inherent elitism of time and money can be minimised) could help create a modal shift in transport to the least polluting systems. Given that one such system is rail, shifts may not be as difficult as imagined. For example:

In Europe, many airlines face pressure to switch short haul slots at congested airports to long haul flights, which represent the most profit-making routes and quickest growing traffic segments. One result has been the emergence in Europe of increased co-operation between airlines and rail operators (Lufthansa-Deutsche Bahn, KLM-NS and United Airlines-SNCF). These partnerships take advantage of well-developed high-speed rail connections to replace short haul regional feeder travel. This trend confirms that high speed rail in Europe is competitive with air travel over distances up to 500km. Given that Eurocontrol, the European Air Traffic Agency, estimates that almost 50% of European air traffic involves flights of less than 500km, this indicates considerable potential for substitution as high-speed rail networks develop. Similarly, in Japan, the extensive high-speed rail network has been singled out as a factor in limiting the development of regional airlines. (OECD 2001: 49)

While it may be argued that in some respects short haul flights might not be as damaging as long haul (due to the lower altitude) this possibility of land-based modal substitution deserves policy attention: ‘A French TGV train broke a world speed record... [3<sup>rd</sup> April 2007] as it hurtled down a newly built track at 574.8 km. per hour (357 mph) in the country's Champagne region’ (Mallet 2007)

The rise in international tourism arrivals from their post war beginnings in 1950 to the massive increase predicted by 2020 is driven by a number of factors including those mentioned in the present paper. Alongside the growth in tourist numbers routinely disseminated by UNWTO, has been an associated growth in the number of destinations. Since the 1950s many countries have recognized the benefits of a strong tourism sector and others have been encouraged by

international agencies (such as UNDP, UNWTO, the World Bank Group) to seek socio-economic development through international tourism. The availability of democratized air travel has both increased demand for international travel and enabled the development of leisure and tourism opportunities in new destinations, thus further increasing demand and spreading benefit (Hall and Higham, 2005, WTTC 2007).

So, not only has the volume of international travel increased but also the number of places in the world that have become dependent on income from overseas travelers to contribute to economic growth. However, what has changed is the rhetoric accompanying the growth forecasts. Speeches by Secretaries General of the UNWTO in previous decades have unequivocally welcomed growth, the more the merrier so to speak. However, speeches from about mid 2006 started to signal a warning note about the social and environmental consequences of tourism and by mid 2007, tackling global warming (along with using tourism as a tool for achieving the Millennium Development Goals) was centre stage: a definite shift in thinking occurred:

Sending a serious reminder, the [UNWTO] Secretary-General Francesco Frangialli stressed climate change is not an abstract concept for tourism. “It is a phenomenon which already affects the sector and certain destinations in particular. We contribute to the greenhouse gas effect, largely through the transport of tourists”. (Heyer 2007)

#### *Current tourism trends and factors for demand change: Demographics*

The population of the world is growing fast but unevenly. In terms of the most widely used demographic transition model (Chesnais 1992), while much of the Western world is in stage four (more or less stable) or even five (post-industrial, services-led economies with reproduction below replacement rates) the population of developing countries continues to rise (Carnell 2001, Palokangas *et al.* 2007). It is many of these countries, with the poorest people, who will also suffer the most from the consequences of global warming. Better healthcare resulting in longer lives in many developed countries means a decreasing

proportion of economically active people in the population: a decreasing number of young people will have to support an increasing number of retirees in addition to having to contribute more to savings for a pension for their own retirement. Discretionary incomes of the economically active are likely to decrease with inevitable increases in fuel costs and costs of goods and services through tax disincentives. In addition, changing patterns of family and work life means that in many countries household sizes are decreasing, i.e. more people living alone or in small family units (ESRC, 2006) which has increased the amount of fuel used in heating, cooling and maintaining individual households, or running motor vehicles.

Not only are the demographic patterns changing along with the sheer scale of population growth in developing countries, but where people live is also undergoing change in such a way as to affect their leisure and vacation intentions. Peopleandplanet.net released a statement in January 2007 that highlights a startling population and habitation trend:

In 2007, for the first time, half the world's population lives in cities. By 2030, the urban population will reach 5 billion — 60% of the world's population... Nearly all population growth will be in the cities of developing countries, whose population will double to nearly 4 billion by 2030 — about the size of the developing world's total population in 1990 (peopleandplanet 2007).

Living in crowded, urban areas will no doubt create further pressures for rural recreational experiences, whether as day trips or as vacations. In either case, Green House Gases (GHG) will be generated.

#### *Tourism mobility as a social desire*

There is a scene in Dennis O'Rourke's documentary film, *Cannibal Tours* (O'Rourke 1988) in which a tourist is walking through a remote village in Papua New Guinea listing off the places he has visited 'Tanzania, South America, New Zealand, Thailand, [etc. etc.]'. The scene illustrates the tendency for what might be termed 'trophy tourism' where the tourist simply 'ticks off' destinations to add to his de-contextualised, passionless collection (Burns, 2005). The social desire

for peak experiences at destinations near and far and resulting cachet coupled with ease of booking have made both spontaneous and planned travel quite compelling (Holden, 2007).

For those parts of the world connected to the global village, inexpensive and easily facilitated access to the Internet has resulted in information being available to consumers at a touch of a computer keyboard bringing destinations seemingly closer. Consumer confidence in booking travel arrangements independently has grown with travel experience and familiarity (Pastor, 2000). The increased competition between destinations and service providers has led to price having a relatively more important place in the marketing mix. Many search engines compete for business on price alone (e.g. Lastminute, Opodo) thereby contributing to an increasingly mobile society, which regards travel as just another consumer product.

Consumers are being offered ever-cheaper trips encouraging long haul air travel – weekend shopping trips to Dubai or New York; weekend safari trips in Kenya; city breaks in China or South Africa. These offer high cachet, peak experiences to cash-rich and time-poor consumers, but with a large carbon footprint. The Henley Centre reports that ‘discontent is on the increase’ and that a lifestyle survey conducted in the UK by them revealed the following (quoted in full):

Up to the half the population is looking to change; They want more quality, less quantity; There’s a growing backlash against out-and-out consumerism; They’re prepared to pay more for experience than goods; Well-being is becoming more important than affluence – epitomized by phrases like ‘work to live’ and ‘quality of life’; Slow is taking over from fast; People are looking for authenticity, inspiration and rejuvenation; And when are the crucial times in the year that they are looking for all this? On holiday (Scottish Enterprise, 2003).

The Henley Centre’s survey show that the time is right for change, a tipping point has arrived when the demand for familiar forms of tourism is in decline.

### *The ethical consumer*

For the last ten years or so, products labelled as 'ethical' were a particular minority niche element of the consumer market. In 2007, although still a relatively small part of the market, growth in sales is outstripping that of many conventional products. For example, the Fairtrade organization is growing in strength:

The estimated retail value of sales of Fairtrade products in the UK in 2005 was £195mn, a 40% increase on 2004...A recent survey by Mintel said British shoppers will spend £2bn on Fairtrade, organic and locally sourced products this year, an increase of 62% since 2002. It also found Fairtrade to be the fastest growing of these sectors with a 265% growth since 2002. Mintel predicted the Fairtrade market would be worth £230mn by the end of 2006 and £547m by 2011 (Fairtrade Foundation, 2006).

In addition to the trends shown in Table 1 (which illustrates the value of ethical sales for a range of products and services) in 2004, four out of every five consumers claimed that ethical issues play some role in their purchasing habits. Spending on ethical products and services had a total value of £29.3bn - a rise of 11% over the previous year (Cooperative Bank, 2005:3). Ethical food products were the most sought ethical consumer products with a total spend in excess of £4bn, followed by personal spending to offset climate change with a total value of around £3.4bn. Expenditure on responsible travel and tourism products is relatively small by comparison, but is still growing at a significant rate with purchases from 'responsible' tour operators rising more rapidly than spend on other ethical travel and tourism products - an increase of 21.7% between 2003 and 2004 (Cooperative Bank, 2005).

### **INSERT Table 1 The Growth in the Market for Ethical Products in the UK 2003 – 4 (edited)**

According to the Future Foundation there is a growing trend amongst young,

educated and opinionated people (the ‘New Puritans’) ‘to curb our enthusiasm for profligate consumption, health and environment-threatening behaviours. Gone is the guilt-free pleasure-seeker, to be replaced by the model well-meaning citizen’ (Seigal, 2005) who goes on to describe them as people who

do not binge drink, smoke, buy big brands, take cheap flights, eat junk food, have multiple sexual partners, waste money on designer clothes, grow beyond their optimum weight, subscribe to celebrity magazines, drive a flash car, or live to watch television. [This is the] beginning of a serious social trend with which large travel operators have yet to deal... If you look at the way our lives are filled with different kinds of social opprobrium, a lot of people are increasingly under ethical pressures, which influence their choices.

Running parallel with the ‘new ethicism’ and the ‘new puritans’ is an interesting proposition for a ‘pro-social strategy’ calling for a recasting of ‘the content and form of the relationship between citizens, on the one hand, and politicians and public officials, on the other.’ (Taylor, 2007). In making the call, Matthew Taylor (Chief Executive of the Royal Society for the Arts) refers to protecting the environment:

in particular to reduc[ing] carbon consumption to a sustainable level, national and international action by governments is vital. But to meet exacting carbon reduction targets, citizens themselves will need voluntarily to change aspects of behaviour and patterns of consumption. Indeed, the most effective instruments may be those that combine the right incentives from government policy with an ability and willingness among the public to support and act upon these incentives.

However, while this looks very positive, in fact most consumers do not act on what they claim to be their convictions. In a compilation of market research asking tourists about their attitude towards sustainable tourism and their preferences for ‘sustainable’ ethical’ or ‘environmentally responsible’ holidays

(Table 2), 75% of consumers claim to consider environmental and/or social issues. In theory it appears that the travelling public is willing to reward tourism businesses or services that have ethical credentials by being prepared to pay a higher price. But data from the Cooperative Bank demonstrates that spend on responsible travel by UK consumers is actually tiny at around £112 million or around 0.004% of the £26.2 billion that UK tourists spent on overseas holidays booked with ABTA agents in 2005 (ABTA, 2005).

**INSERT Table 2 Market research demonstrating demand for ethical tourism experiences from UK residents when holidaying at home or overseas**

A new and revitalized political and cultural framework where the present paradigm of ‘travel: the perfect freedom’ (NTA, 2002) becomes overwhelmed by the need for ‘freedom from impacts of climate change’ will be necessary.

*Travel versus climate change: the complexity of tourists’ awareness of Climate Change*

The starting point for this section is the clear sea change in the UNWTO perspective on global growth and consumption:

As a social activity, tourism has changed and continues to transform itself under pressure from its environment. UNWTO stresses that it is increasingly apparent how tourism is falling victim --but also contributing-- to climate change and the reduction of biodiversity. The path ahead is therefore marked by a different type of growth: more moderate, more solid and more responsible (Frangiali, 2007).

This talk of moderation and responsible travel feeds into the growing awareness amongst the general public within Europe of the issues around climate change (Adeel & Glantz, 2002). While the media may carry numerous articles and television programs about the impact of our consumption patterns and mobile lifestyles on climate change, the mixed messages about tourism and travel products (for example, the generally uncritical portrayal of ecotourism in the popular press and broadcast media) are very mixed (see table 4).

Research by major fast moving consumer goods retailers has demonstrated that consumers are wanting to make changes to their patterns of behaviour to reduce waste and carbon emissions, but they are looking for the businesses they patronize to guide and enable them to do this. Many retailers including WalMart, Tesco, and M&S are making plans to become carbon neutral in their business practice (Llewellyn 2006), and promote this to customers as a way of gaining competitive advantage (cf. Monbiot, 2007, for a somewhat nihilistic, ‘all is lost’ discussion of this topic).

Mass package tourism is still popular but operates on very low margins of profitability, making it difficult for operators to make changes to the impact these have on the environment and hosts without substantially increasing costs. Given the complexity of supply chains, operators view changes to their business models as problematic (Daniele, *et al.* 2007). The development of a tourist industry (especially ecotourism) on small, fragile, and remote sites is often seen as a way of a balanced poverty reduction strategy, but the influx of relatively wealthy westerners can result in the exploitation of these destinations, both in terms of over-use of the natural resources and in exploitation of local workers. In some senses, eco-tourism remains a distraction from the main issues related to climate change, especially given the irony of the carbon intensive long haul flight necessary to partake in this market segment.

The literature reveals several further layers of complexity: first, tourism that is more sustainable is both possible and desirable (Higham *et al.* 2006, UNWTO 2007); second, there is a need to balance societal and environmental impacts against economic growth (Burns, 1999) and WTTC (2007) who raise the question ‘is growth to be pursued purely for profit, or is the Travel & Tourism sector capable of acting as responsible World Citizens, balancing business needs with cultural, social and environmental factors?’); third, pro-active intervention in the form of both actions and leadership from the full range of stakeholders, i.e. thinking about mitigation actions and implementing them (Dubois *et al.*, 2006); fourth, the changes required to business models in mitigation against GHG presents an opportunity to use newly emerging business models based on



sustainability aspects as a business driver (Pedersen *et al.*, 2006). In addition, innovation in tourism product design needs to be matched by consumer changes: a virtuous circle of technology, business inspiration and changing expectations (Decelle, 2004) and businesses need to skilfully create and communicate a robust sustainability message whereby imaginative products still deliver peak experiences but with a smaller carbon footprint i.e. sustainability as a core business driver (Garavelli, 2007). Finally, there is a need to clarify the tourism's climate change situation and communicate/ educate stakeholders about buying into sustainable livelihoods (Rwanda Development Gateway, 2006).

As the literature illustrates, the issues around climate change and tourism are full of contradictions between causes, consequences, and the prevailing zeitgeist. It is the investigation of these contradictions that may result in insights for developing solutions.

#### *Developing solutions through identification of contradictions*

Patterson *et al* (2006) in developing a conceptual model within which to place recent research offer a framework for problem solvers that recognize 'The mix of causal and consequential factors within the same model relating to climate change and human activity, while rare, is increasingly necessary to address sustainability challenges.' Some of the contradictions that highlight the problem and which form the basis for discussion are listed in Tables 3 (business) and 4 (consumer):

#### **INSERT Table 3 Business Contradictions**

#### **INSERT Table 4 Consumer Contradictions**

The contradictions identified in the tables above arise from relationships between both industry players and individuals within society. Each have different levels of power and access to the means of communication: the contradictions are not, therefore, mutually exclusive. It may be deduced that there is a general confusion about who or what type of organizations should take a leadership role

in addressing climate change issues. People seem to know that ‘something is wrong’ but don’t know what to do about it. This position is underpinned by a feeling that perhaps individual action (or action by an individual business) will not provide critical mass to mitigate a global problem of immense complexity.

*Research Elements, Questions and Issues arising*

These complexities can be usefully problematized in the form of research questions. In the present case, five questions, together with related issues are presented next.

First, consumers and society: “How can the desire for leisure mobility be managed so that it continues to be part of modern life without causing environmental harm or social resentment?” The issues arising include the need for a) clarity about what drives the ‘compulsion for mobility’, b) the need for clear, consistent and reliable public information about impact of tourism on climate change, c) positive messages about potential for individual actions for good, and d) a greater understanding of the impact of profligate lifestyles and consumption patterns on sustainable futures.

The second area, sustainable human development raises the question “How can the paradox of carbon emissions generated by tourism and its key role in achieving the Millennium Development Goals be resolved?” Several issues arise in response to the question, a) greater understanding and insights into the consequences of mitigation policies and actions (i.e. less travel) and the economics of sustainable human development, b) turning the previous idea on its head, an understanding of the impact of sustainable development policies and related poverty alleviation strategies (i.e. more tourism) on climate change, and c) the sheer range of issues and opportunities that arise from the relationship between sustainable development, climate change and tourism.

The third area, policies, instruments and co-operation asks “How can international agreements on travel and tourism be determined so that they create a level playing field where competition and merit rewards responsible business practice?” In reaching for an answer, insights into the impact of non-sector specific (generic) policy instruments such as taxes, emissions trading together with the development of international agreements to give a level playing field for

the implementation of policies and instruments together with creative learning from international knowledge exchanges and intra-sectoral cooperation must be engendered.

Fourth, tourism sector mitigation actions “How can the tourism sector manage its various supply chains in such a way as to both minimize carbon footprints and maximize tourism as an agent for environmental protection?” The tourism sector needs multidisciplinary analysis and pan-sector scenario modelling that can help the formulation of robust, sector specific evidence-base for policy synergies. Moreover, technology-monitoring/ knowledge transfer and rapid cross sector deployment linking potential and costs of mitigation to sector’s adaptive capacity and capability are essential as is the ability to assess the impact from and on other sectors of the economy. Finally, in terms of communication across sectors, the question “How can communication between government, industry, the media and consumers be designed to influence and motivate positive behavioural change?” can be posed. With this question, not only should there be clarity about the principles of ‘influencing behaviour’ in tourism and its relation to emerging societal pressures and obligations related to climate change. Also, the whole notion of choice and competition driving innovation may have to be contextualized with the framework of decisional heuristics relevant to key tourism behaviours and attitudes.

## CONCLUSION

If the ‘End of Tourism’ and Monbiot’s (2007) nihilistic vision of no air travel is not to prevail, there is the need to balance the ways in which tourism continues to bring economic benefits to regions and pleasure to millions with the fact that it is a major (and growing) contributor to GHG. If consumers are to be influenced in their travel and tourism choices then communication between government, industry, the media and consumers will need to be designed, or even radicalized, to motivate socially beneficial behaviour.

Tourism is a profoundly important economic sector for most countries and regions of the world: for most countries, not to have tourism is not an option. The

consequences of climate change on businesses, people and destinations are of such a magnitude that creative thinking and stretches of the imagination far beyond normal will be required to ensure a healthy and profitable future for the sector. From the perspective of tourism scholars, the research questions articulated above (Table 5) will help in leading to fresh insights. As the environmental debates mature and spread, tourism (increasingly linked to and located in wider socio-economic questions) cannot simply be 'read' as a business proposition with a series of impacts that can be dealt with through marketing and short-term fixes. Wider issues of the sector's future shape and sustainable options need to be articulated, investigated and addressed.

The making and consuming of tourism takes place within a complex social milieu whereby culture and people become part of the commercial product. More modern interpretations of culture, place the physical environment (referred to as 'space' by both physical and cultural geographers) at its centre, while the latest thinking on sustainability also (and necessarily) gives precedence to environmental impacts. The implications are not fully understood, though the literature places the arguments along a continuum with technology on the one hand being able to provide fixes that will save us all, while on the other hand the worst case scenarios produced by well placed, authoritative sources seem to indicate that all is lost. The answers of course are far more nuanced than each end the spectrum can provide and have to focus around the idea of mitigation.

In this sense, the industry has parallel tracks to follow. First (in the short term), how to work with governments, supply/ value chain links, and consumers to develop business models with minimized carbon footprints. Second, at a more fundamental level, a thorough examination of its practices and methods to develop entirely new ways of satisfying consumer needs for 'peak experiences'; thirdly, how multiple modes and directions of communication between government, industry, the media, and consumers can be effective in developing socially beneficial behavior and new ways of relating to each other. Simply discussing changing patterns of distribution, tourist flows and adaptive product

development avoids the deep problem of consumption patterns and human behaviour, which would hasten the 'End of Tourism'.

Final Draft

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**Table 1 The Growth in the Market for Ethical Products in the UK 2003 – 4  
(edited)**

	Spend (£ mn.) 2003	Spend (£ mn.) 2004	% growth 2003 - 2004
Food:			
Organic	1,015	1119	10.2
Fairtrade	92	140	52.2
Free range eggs	188	215	14.4
Vegetarian products and meat alternatives	613	626	2.1
Ethical boycotts - grocery and food outlets	1857	1947	4.8
Sub-total	3765	4047	7.5
Travel and Transport:			
Environmentally friendly transport	22	20	-9.1
Public transport	348	380	9.2
Responsible tour operators	92	112	21.7
Environmental tourist attractions	19	20	5.3
Ethical boycotts - travel	1040	1112	6.9
Sub-total	1521	1644	8.1
Grand total (all sectors from the original table)	22358	25808	15.4

Source: Cooperative Bank (2005:5)

**Table 2 Market research demonstrating demand for “ethical” tourism experiences from UK residents when holidaying at home or overseas**

Surveys among UK residents taking holidays overseas	Commission Focus ed by		Year	%
Reputation of the holiday company on environmental issues is important	ABTA*	Outbound	2002	70
A holiday should not damage the environment (agree or strongly agree)	ABTA	Outbound	2002	85
A holiday should benefit people at the destination (agree or strongly agree)	ABTA	Outbound	2002	71
Willing to pay more for holiday to reduce environmental impacts	ABTA	Outbound	2002	45
How important is it to you that your holiday benefit people of the destination?	Tearfund	Outbound	2002	76
How important is it to you that your holiday does not damage the environment (agree or strongly agree)?	Tearfund	Outbound	2002	87
How important is it to you that your holiday includes visits to experience local culture and foods (agree or strongly agree)?	Tearfund	Outbound	2002	81
Are more clients asking about responsible tourism (Yes)	TearFund	Outbound	2001	30
Would not be prepared to pay more to guarantee environmental and socio-economic benefits	TearFund	Outbound	2002	6
What percentage of your customers are interested in taking ethical holidays?	Weedon, C.	Outbound	2001	88

Source: Rebecca Hawkins, personal correspondence \* Association of British Travel Agents



**Table 3 Business Contradictions**

Irrefutable evidence about the consequences of climate change	Lack of information about magnitude and type of change needed in response
Major retail companies are beginning to recognize the need to adopt responsible business practices	Irresponsible and misleading advertising continues
Immediate costs and risks to businesses in changing practices and products	Benefits accrue slowly over time; stock market demands for short term increases in stockholder value
Much of tourism competition is price-led	Ethical tourism is presently more expensive
Large segments of travel and tourism markets compete on price alone with destination 'irrelevant' provided it meets basic climatic requirements	Ruthless driving down of costs and reduced benefits to destinations destabilizes attempts at mitigation
Growth of the 'experience economy' offers opportunities for more product development	Energy intensive peak experiences may be rationed by price and (perhaps) regulation
Eco tourism products in remote destinations	Do not take account of air travel. Ecotourism as of the problem rather than part of the solution
Faster aircraft reduce travel times	Higher speeds use more fuel
Imperative for continued business growth	Need imaginative product diversification and innovation for less carbon intensive sector

**Table 4 Consumer Contradictions**

Hypermobile consumers travel greater distances frequently both for business and pleasure	These consumers represent a small proportion of the total population but use a disproportionate amount of resources
Incessant demand for more air and car travel	Increasing congestion of airports, skies and roads generating increasingly unpleasant conditions
Growing consumer awareness of ethical consumption and need to change	Lack of knowledge about what changes to make or what choices are available; who to trust
Consumers off-set air travel by making payments to carbon off-set schemes	Does not lead to changes in behavior, but continuation of high consumption patterns
Faster aircraft reducing travel times	Longer amounts of time spent getting to and through airports
Pressure for conspicuous consumption through lifestyle changes	Need to reduce consumption to mitigate against global warming
Personal leisure travel planned on an annual cycle	If restrictions on carbon-intensive activities apply, personal planning over a 10 year or life-stage cycle may be necessary
Mixed messages in the media: 2 page spread warning of catastrophic dangers of climate change in Independent newspaper (3/2/2007) On the same page an advert from American Airlines advertising 'smaller fares' (London-New York reduced to \$399 return)	Messages 'neutralize' one another causing lack of change through consumer inertia and apathy