Sustainable Tourism for Development – Virtual Special Issue Tourism Planning & Development

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With the United Nations General Assembly declaring 2017 as the *International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development* aimed at fostering the potential of tourism to advance the universal *2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), it was hoped that the importance of sustainable tourism will be further showcased and understood. As the 2017 year of celebrations comes to an end, the editorial team of Tourism Planning and Development decided to contribute to its celebration by compiling this virtual special issue on *Sustainable Tourism for Development*, with the aim of sharing selected knowledge produced on the topic between 2014 and 2017.

That travel and tourism is a major contributor to the global economy is a well traversed topic. In such context, the integrity of the destination we visit becomes paramount, both in terms of its long-term survival and the responsibility we have to take action for the preservation of the very resources that attracted tourists in the first place. Tourism aspires to be a more stable, higher-yielding, responsible and sustainable, delivering tangible and equitable benefits to communities. However, there is an increasing danger involved in approaching tourism only form a commercially focussed perspective and reacting purely to shifting market demand, which will not deliver the aspired responsible forms of tourism that promote and enhance long-term inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Globally, tourism is increasingly portrayed as aiding sustainable development and international development agencies, national and regional development bodies, private and third sector organisations see it as an important tool for socio-economic development, cross cultural integration, peace building and environmental preservation. Tourism has proved to play a key role in market diversification, inclusive growth and sustainable tourism development in some of the most

peripheral locations in the world. However, despite its many benefits, most recent work critically addresses the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, by clearly rejecting the idea of a passive 'business as usual' approach. Sustainable tourism is mentioned in the 2030 Agenda four times; however, the term is strongly contested by civil society organisations and academics for its lack of a people-centred approach. A caring approach suggests that the wellbeing of every individual is connected to all others and that planetary boundaries need to be respected. Only tourism that contributes to the improvement of the well-being of local people, dignity of workers, environmental integrity as well as the elimination of exploitation, inequalities and poverty, is a meaningful option for sustainable development.

While according to some, the *International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development* has placed sustainable tourism right at the heart of the agenda of many tour operators and inspire an increasing number of consumers, some critics have seen this initiative as a mere commercially focused strategy to adapt to shifting market demand or worse as an additional 'greenwashing' exercise, ignoring the multifaceted nature of tourism as a vehicle to sustainable development. A moral commitment to caring for people and planet must accompany efforts to implement sustainable tourism.

The 16 selected papers forming this virtual special issue offers perspectives from different geographical areas, regions and locations (i.e. rural, coastal, urban and mountainous) as well as conceptual and empirical reserch on specific issues (e.g. all-inclusive tourism, community-based tourism, cruise, certification, etc.) conducted by colleagues, tirelessly attempting to deconstruct the issues associated with the sustainability paradigm and aims at stimulating further critical thinking on sustainable tourism for development.