



Tourism, Poverty and Development

Andrew Holden



ROUTLEDGE



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Poverty alleviation is high on the global policy agenda, its importance being emphasised by its place as the first of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. As a potentially significant source of economic growth in developing countries, tourism may also play a major role in poverty reduction and alleviation under the right circumstances. The incorporation of tourism into development policy and Poverty Reduction Strategies has special poignancy for those Least Developed Countries where natural resources exist to support a tourism industry and there are limited development alternatives.

This book offers a holistic, explicit and detailed introduction to the relationship of poverty and tourism within the context of developing countries. It is divided into distinct sections, progressing from an evaluation of the key concepts of poverty, tourism and development; to the causal factors of poverty; to the mechanisms of how tourism is being implemented in policy and practice to reduce poverty; and finally to an analysis of the relationship between tourism and poverty alleviation in the future. The adopted analytical approach of the key themes is multi-disciplinary, incorporating tourism studies, human geography, political economy, economics, development and environmental studies. It integrates examples and original case studies from varying geographical developing regions including Africa, South Asia and East Asia and the Pacific, to lend practical insights into tourism's role in poverty alleviation.

The text will be of particular interest to higher education students from tourism studies, geography, political economy, environmental and development studies, and sociology backgrounds. It will also be of relevance to government and policy makers, alongside those who have a more general interest in poverty alleviation.

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Introduction

The image on the front cover of this book illustrates a contrast of lifestyles between those living in an up-market area of apartment blocks and those inhabiting a shanty town on their fringes. The image also emphasises that whilst juxtaposed to each other these places have differing characteristics reflective of different paths and levels of development. The unfinished road in the picture could be interpreted as a pathway of development, moving from where we are to where we want to be. Referring to Radcliffe's description of different global lifestyles (1999: 84): 'Cosmopolitan jet setters in São Paulo live one kind of development while women in sub-Saharan Africa walking for hours to collect water experience a completely different kind of development', it is not difficult to transpose this observation to the much smaller spatial area of the front cover. It is this diversity of wealth and development between people and places that this book critically evaluates and analyses, with a central focus resting on how tourism can be adapted to be used for goals of poverty reduction and human development.

As is emphasised in the title, the book has a specific geographical orientation to developing countries, particularly the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), as it is in these countries that people face the most challenging economic and social conditions. The concept of global or world poverty is an interesting one, as a geographical analysis of those people living on less than the World Bank income measure of US\$1.25 per day and therefore labelled as being in absolute poverty is limited to sub-Saharan Africa, South and East Asia, and Latin America. However, if poverty is defined as being relative, that is, not having enough to meet the expected norms of living standards of the country one lives in, then poverty can be understood as applying to all countries in the world. Discouragingly, whilst the percentage of the world's population living in absolute poverty has fallen during the last 30 years, the poverty of inequality is simultaneously growing between countries and within countries. As Collier (2008) poignantly puts it in his thesis

‘The Bottom Billion’, whilst 80 per cent of the world’s population now live in countries that are developing, the remaining 20 per cent live in countries that are falling behind and often apart. At the same time, in the context of relative poverty in many developed countries, there is growing disparity between the wealth of the people at the ‘top’ and those at the ‘bottom’.

Nevertheless, when Yunus (2007) writes of ‘Creating a World Without Poverty’, Landes (1998) evaluates ‘The Wealth and Poverty of Nations’, and Reinert (2007) explains ‘How Rich Countries Got Rich . . . and Why Poor Countries Stay Poor’, the inter-connectedness of a global poverty has a resonance beyond purely a geographical limitation. As is discussed in [Chapter 1](#), poverty has moral and ethical associations with it that stretch beyond national boundaries, both in the sense of people who are experiencing it but also in the solutions to ‘reducing’ it or ‘alleviating’ it. Sachs (2005) suggests that the solutions for alleviating poverty rest not just with global agencies such as the United Nations or World Bank, but with everyone who is in a position to contribute. This approach emphasises the inter-connectedness of places, a feature of our contemporary society that is explored in [Chapter 3](#), and the trend towards ‘time–space’ compression that are inherent to the idea of the ‘global village’ and globalisation that are discussed in [Chapter 4](#).

World poverty also has significance in the implications for peace and security on a global level, as the consequences of poverty inevitably lead to conflict over resources, migration and in some cases aid the recruitment of ‘terrorists’ or ‘freedom fighters’. World poverty also has significance in the sense that when the causes of poverty are analysed, it is apparent that these are not limited to the feature of the place where the ‘poor’ inhabit but are outcomes of a complicated interaction of historical and contemporary political and economic processes, which have progressively linked countries together into a situation of unequal power relationships of global dependencies and market systems. Whilst this system has brought benefits to the majority of the world’s populations, defined by a growth in absolute income and increased material living standards, access to education and health care and life expectancy, it has also left a sizeable minority excluded and falling further behind.

Questions also abound as to who has the authority to define poverty and decide the necessary interactions to alleviate it. Is the poverty reduction project simply one of humanitarianism, with an ethical imperative to do the ‘right’ thing as a consequence of an empathy of universal suffering, or is it more representative of ideological, political and economic interests? As Hayter (1981: 27) claims, ‘The past is not irrelevant’ in the context of understanding poverty and development, and the need to expand markets and fields of investments were driving forces of the European imperial and colonial projects, which were to have a significant impact on how countries developed. Similarly, the political and economic rivalry between the capitalist ideology of the United States and the communist Soviet

Union has had a major impact on the then newly independent countries of Africa and Asia in the post-Second World War era.

During the last four decades, a range of interlocking factors emerged that have influenced the relationship between development and poverty. Politically and economically, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the communist Soviet Union have temporarily led to a lack of a credible alternative economic ideology to capitalism. More countries have been integrated into the global market as the market mechanism has enjoyed an unrivalled supremacy as the most efficient means for resource allocation. One country to have economically benefited from this is China, whose political and economic influence extends worldwide, with an omnipresence of investment in the continent of Africa, ironically whilst it still lays claim to being communist. Other countries have also become economic players on the world stage, referred to in the acronym of 'BRIC', that is, Brazil, Russia and India alongside China. A further change is the influence of environmental constraints on development as the concerns of the United Nations 'Earth Summit' in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro have become reality. Twenty years later, with Rio + 20 having taken place, issues of climate change and the requirement for sustainable development are key players in shaping approaches to development policy. They also have significant implications for development policy and poverty reduction, as new approaches need to be found as to how countries can combine economic growth with poverty reduction in a sustainable framework that will not exceed the ecological capacities of the planet, as exemplified in the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) call for a 'Green Economy'.

An evident trend since the 1980s has been the increased mobility of people between and within countries, sometimes referred to as the era of 'hyper-mobility'. A key component of this movement is tourism, the recreational component of which involves people moving between countries out of choice, usually as an outcome of a desire to experience contrasting natural and cultural environments to the ones at home. Although comparatively small in terms of its share of the global tourism market, the fastest growing trend for international travel has been for travel to LDCs. It is the 'comparative advantage' of many LDCs' natural and cultural resources that have appeal to tourists from developed countries and provide the rationale for the use of tourism for economic development and poverty reduction. The emergence of a growing middle class in many developing countries also offers the potential for domestic tourism to play a key role in the battle against poverty reduction, not least because there is a higher propensity for domestic tourists to make use of the tourist services provided by the poor in the informal sector of the economy. Tourism has the potential of taking the consumer, that is, the tourist, to the point of production with the potential to benefit poor people directly, and LDCs do not face the same level of trade restrictions and competitive challenges in the world market for tourism as they do for agriculture

or manufactured goods. The key challenge is how to integrate the poor into the tourism industry and system so that they may benefit from its growth in LDCs.

Questions are also being asked within the context of the development project, its purpose and the terminologies that are inscribed within it. The questioning of the purpose of development has become more common, particularly in Western-centric thinking, as questions are asked about where are we ‘developing’ to, and the extent of the relevance of the term in societies that have reached the stage of mass consumption. The use of labels and terminologies is also sometimes reflecting different economic and political orientations. A range of terms and classifications exist to describe the relativity of countries in terms of their development. These include: developed, developing and underdeveloped; First, Second and Third, and sometimes Fourth, Worlds; Least Developed Countries; high-, middle-, and low-income countries. Then there is the term of the ‘poor’ and deciding who is in poverty, which, as is explained in [Chapter 1](#), relates to political, economic and cultural constructs as much as it does to deprivation.

The terms the ‘First’ and the ‘Third Worlds’ resonate with the geography of post-Second World War politics. The world was divided into ‘modern’ (the First World) and the ‘traditional and underdeveloped’ (the Third World). The First World was then subdivided into the ‘free’, that is, capitalist ‘First World’, whilst the communist system of the Soviet Union and allies formed the ‘Second World’. The term of the ‘Fourth World’ represents a more recent addition to the lexicon, reflecting the economic and political conditions of some of the world’s poorest indigenous peoples. However, since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, these terms have considerably less relevance outside their historical context.

A broad distinction is made in the literature between ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ countries but there exists no established convention for their designation within the United Nations system. In common practice, Japan in Asia, Canada and the United States in northern America, Australia and New Zealand in Oceania and Europe are considered ‘developed’ regions or areas (OECD, 2012). The commonality of developed countries is their highly developed economy and advanced technological infrastructure relative to other developing nations. Typically the criteria for evaluating the degree of economic development relates to the level of gross domestic product (GDP), per capita income, levels of industrialisation, the level of infrastructure development and general standard of living, but the criteria to be used and which countries are or are not classified as being developed is a contentious issue.

Defining the category of Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the UN General Assembly identified a group of LDCs in 1971 to be afforded special attention in the context of implementing the second United Nations Development Decade of the 1970s. Four United Nations Conferences on the LDCs have been held since, each charting a decade programme for them. The first two were held in Paris in

1981 and in 1990, the third in Brussels in 2001 and the fourth in Istanbul in 2011. However, the General Assembly has never established the development taxonomy for its full membership (Nielsen, 2011). The United Nations identify a total of 48 LDCs of which 33 are in Africa, 14 in Asia and the Pacific, and one in Latin America and the Caribbean. In terms of their geographical characteristics, 16 are totally landlocked, that is, have no coastline or access to the sea, and 11 are small islands (United Nations, 2012). The LDCs also share common characteristics: their exports are heavily dependent on natural resources and low-skilled manufactured goods; almost 60 per cent of the population is under the age of 25; and more than half of the population lives on less than \$1.25 purchasing power parity (PPP) per day.

A significant country classification system that recognises the multidimensional character of development is the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) which was launched in 1990 and is discussed in [Chapter 1](#). The HDI is a composite index of three indices based upon countries' achievements in longevity, education and income. Other aspects of development, including political freedoms and personal security were also recognised as being important, but the lack of available data prevented their inclusion. In contrast to the UNDP, the World Bank categorises countries by their income levels into categories of low, middle and high incomes per capita per annum. Based upon the Gross National Income (GNI) figures for 2011, the groups are: low income, US\$1,025 or less; lower middle income, US\$1,026 – \$4,035; upper middle income, US\$4,036 – \$12,475; and high income, US\$12,476 or more (World Bank, 2012).

Whilst, it may initially seem odd to suggest some kind of symbiotic relationship exists between tourism and poverty, given the former is generally associated with pleasure and the latter with hardship and misery, it is the collision of two extremes from which a positive outcome can be achieved for the 'poor'. This book seeks to illustrate that this relationship is not as strange as it may first seem, through exploring the characteristics and structure of tourism that makes it a viable development option to reduce poverty in developing countries. It subsequently extends beyond the boundaries of traditional books on tourism development to examine the interaction of tourism development with the poor. It is a book that tries to incorporate a strong message of social justice, to examine tourism as a system rather than purely as an industry, and to embed its relationship with poverty into an ethical framework.

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1

Explaining and understanding poverty

This chapter:

- Critically evaluates the concept of poverty
- Identifies its relevance to individuals and global society
- Analyses its characteristics, definitions and multidimensionality
- Explores its spatial distribution

POVERTY AS A SOCIAL CONCERN

The term ‘poverty’ is embedded into the global vernacular and has relevance to people’s lives to varying intensities, from the removed luxury of a subject of dinner table debate to the actual suffering of those experiencing it. Poverty represents a political and moral challenge for society (MacPherson and Silburn, 1998) as is captured in the following statement from the Commission for Africa (2005: 13) with reference to Africa: ‘African poverty and stagnation is the greatest tragedy of our time. Poverty on such a scale demands a forceful response . . . The developed world has a moral duty – as well as a powerful motive of self-interest – to assist Africa.’ Similarly the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC, 2009: vii) suggests that: ‘tackling chronic poverty is the global priority of our generation’. One of the most cited poverty specialists, Professor Jeremy Sachs, estimates that 8 million people per annum die because they are too poor to stay alive (Sachs, 2005). Poverty is typically conceived as a negative state of being that threatens life and denies livelihood opportunities, a condition that people seek to evade and one for which there exists a moral imperative for the wealthier to help the ‘poor’ to escape from. It is likely that the majority of us would sympathise with Seabrook’s (2007: 35) description of someone as having a ‘distended stomach

and discoloured hair of malnourishment, the skeletal figures lying listlessly while the flies encrust their eyes' as being in chronic poverty.

This desire to alleviate poverty has been demonstrated through initiatives such as the Make Poverty History campaign run by several British charities and at a global level is embedded in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as shown in [Box 1.1](#). These represent internationally agreed goals for a civil society amongst 150 Heads of States of the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, building on the outcomes of international conferences on development and poverty through the 1990s. Whilst there are eight goals, the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger is placed as the first goal as a statement of ambition. More specifically the actual target relating to this goal is to halve by 2015 the proportion of people whose income is less than US\$1 per day compared to the figure for 1990. As will become apparent in the following chapters, the other seven goals can also be understood as having a direct relevance to poverty reduction, through providing security and opportunities to break free from the poverty trap in which hundreds of millions of people are currently caught.

BOX 1.1 THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Goal	Target
1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 per day
2) Achieve universal primary education	Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling
3) Promote gender inequality and empower women	Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015
4) Reduce child mortality	Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate
5) Improve maternal health	Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality rate

- | | |
|---|--|
| 6) Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases | Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/Aids |
| 7) Ensure environmental sustainability | <p>Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources</p> <p>Halve by 2015, the proportion of people with sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation</p> <p>By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers</p> |
| 8) Develop a global partnership for development | <p>Address the special needs of the least developed countries, landlocked countries and small island developing states</p> <p>Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system</p> <p>Deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt</p> <p>In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth</p> <p>In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries</p> <p>In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications</p> |

Source: UNDP, 2003

The geographical distribution of poverty is typically associated with developing countries or the loosely applied term of the ‘South’, meaning the continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Yet, according to Lister (2004: 1), poverty is not just a problem of the ‘South’ but also of the ‘North’, a problem in developed countries as well as the developing, a perspective that is endorsed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2000). Subsequently, to begin to be able to analyse and evaluate how tourism could be utilised for poverty reduction, it is essential to have a clearer understanding of how poverty has been interpreted and categorised. As Lines (2008) points out, before poverty can be confined to history it is necessary to understand the forces that create it and why poor people are indeed poor.

Whilst most people would profess sympathy with those in poverty, it is a highly complex concept and there is divided opinion about whether poverty is primarily concerned with a lack of monetary income or involves other factors such as social exclusion, marginalisation, vulnerability, political repression and victimisation. As will become evident in this chapter, poverty has been interpreted in various ways through the lens of political, economic, cultural, historic and cultural changes. The extent of recognising poverty as a ‘problem’ is influenced by moral judgement, religious conviction and political beliefs and the effects of its impacts on society. Several questions can be asked about poverty: Why should we be concerned about tackling poverty? What do we visualise and mean by poverty? Why do people end up in poverty? Who has responsibility for dealing with poverty? How can it be mitigated, reduced and alleviated? Is poverty geographically limited to developing countries? None of these questions have easy or straightforward answers, nor are there necessarily definitive ones.

The ethical and social concerns that poverty can raise are evident in the following two commentaries delivered over one hundred years apart. The first was written by Friedrich Engels in the middle of the nineteenth century, describing the living conditions of the proletariat in a rapidly urbanising Manchester in England, the first city in the world to develop as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution. Engels (1845: 100) comments:

If we briefly formulate the results of our wanderings, we must admit that 35000 working people of Manchester and its environs live, almost all of them, in wretched, damp, filthy cottages, that the streets which surround them are usually in the most miserable and filthy condition, laid out without the slightest reference to ventilation, with reference solely to the profit secured by the contractor. In a word, we must confess that in the working men’s dwellings of Manchester, no cleanliness, no convenience, and consequently no comfortable family life is possible, that in such dwellings only a physically degenerate race, robbed of all humanity, degraded, reduced morally and physically to bestiality, could feel comfortable at home.

The social concern is evident in Engels' description, as is a condition of poverty in which alongside physiological hardship rests a psychological denial of one's rights as a human being and citizen. Whilst the conditions of the 'working men's dwellings' have substantially improved in Manchester during the intervening period, over 130 years later Robert McNamara, the then president of the World Bank, made a speech in Nairobi in Kenya which launched the concept of 'absolute poverty', describing it as:

a condition of life so degraded by disease, illiteracy, malnutrition and squalor as to deny its victims basic human necessities . . . a condition of life so limited as to prevent realisation of the potential of the genes with which one is born; a condition of life so degrading as to insult human dignity – and yet a condition of life so common as to be the lot of some 40% of the peoples of the developing countries.

(McNamara, 1973, cited in George and Sabelli, 1994)

Ironically the absolute poverty that McNamara was describing has itself become a tourist attraction in Nairobi as is described in [Box 1.2](#), lending a direct interaction to tourism with poverty in a controversial way that raises ethical and social issues over the appropriateness of this type of activity.

BOX 1.2 'SLUMMING IT: POVERTY TOURS COME TO NAIROBI'

Whilst Robert McNamara defined absolute poverty during his address in Nairobi in 1973, four decades later absolute poverty has itself become a tourist attraction in the city, raising issues of morality and ethics about the interaction between tourism and poverty. The title of this box is taken from an article by Rice (2009) in a newspaper about tour operators who have started selling guided tours through Kibera, one of the most deprived urban areas in Nairobi, located only a short drive from the luxury hotels where most foreign tourists stay. The tourists pay approximately US\$35 for a tour that promises 'a glimpse into the lives of the hundreds of thousands of people crammed into tiny rooms along dirt paths littered with excrement-filled plastic bags known as "flying toilets"'.

The described pattern of interaction offers potential benefits to the local community; for example, through philanthropic tourists giving donations to a local orphanage and buying handicrafts from a women's craft shop, and at least one of the tour operators promises