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Post COVID-19 ecological and social reset: moving away from capitalist growth models towards tourism as Buen Vivir

Phoebe Everingham^a and Natasha Chassagne^b

^aUniversity of Newcastle, Callaghan, Australia; ^bUniversity of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia

ABSTRACT

Tourism has been one of the industries most highly affected by COVID-19. The COVID-19 global pandemic is an 'unprecedented crisis' and has exposed the pitfalls of a hyper consumption model of economic growth and development. The scale of immediate economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic has shattered the myth of 'catch up development' and 'perpetual growth'. The Crisis has brought unintended degrowth, presenting opportunities for an economic and social 'reset'. In terms of long-term thinking post COVID-19, it is time to change the parameters of how we imagine a trajectory going forward, to prefigure possibilities for contesting capitalist imperatives that 'there is no alternative'. In relation to tourism, the pandemic provides an opportunity for reimagining tourism otherwise, away from exploitative models that disregard people, places, and the natural environment, and towards a tourism that has positive impacts. Non-western alternatives to neo-colonial and neoliberal capitalism, such the South American concept of 'Buen Vivir', can help us to shift priorities away from economic growth, towards greater social and environmental wellbeing, and meaningful human connections. Taking a Buen Vivir approach to tourism will continue the degrowth momentum, for transformative change in society within the earth's physical limits. Yet Buen Vivir also redefines the parameters of how we understand 'limits'. In limiting unsustainable practices in development and tourism, a focus on Buen Vivir actually creates growth in other areas, such as social and environmental wellbeing, and meaningful human connection. Buen Vivir can reorient the tourism industry towards localised tourism, and slow tourism because the principles of Buen Vivir require these alternatives to be small-scale, local and benefiting host communities as well as tourists to increase the wellbeing for all.

摘要

旅游产业是受到新型冠状病毒严重影响的产业之一。新型冠状病毒全球性危机是一场“前所未有的危机”，暴露了过度消费型经济增长与发展模式的陷阱。新型冠状病毒全球性危机对经济的直接影响程度已经打破了“追赶发展”、“永久增长”的神话。这次危机带来了意想不到的退增长，在一定程度上为经济和社会的重构提供了机会。关于后疫情时代的长期思考，是时候改变我们对未来轨迹设想了，

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关键词

新型冠状病毒; 美好生活; 退增长; 殖民地旅游; 新殖民主义; 新自由资本主义; 预测策略

是时候预测挑战资本主义“无替代品”原则的可能性。对于旅游业而言，这次流行病为重塑旅游业提供了机会，使其摆脱以往无视人、空间和自然环境的剥削模式，转向了具有积极影响的旅游业。新殖民主义和新自由资本主义的非西方替代品，例如南美洲“美好生活”的概念，可以帮助我们将发展重点从经济增长转移到更大的社会和环境福祉，以及更有意义的人际关系上。采用追求美好生活的方式发展旅游业将继续保持增长动力，以实现在地球的物理极限范围内的社会变革。与此同时，美好生活也重新定义了我们对“极限”的解析参数。在限制经济社会发展和旅游业的不可持续行为时，对美好生活的关注实际上促进了其他领域的增长，如社会和环境福祉，以及有意义的人际关系。美好生活可以将旅游业重新定位为本土化旅游、慢速旅游业，因为美好生活原则要求这些替代品必须是大规模的、本土的，以及有助于社区居民和游客增加福祉的。

Introduction

The COVID-19 global pandemic is an ‘unprecedented crisis’, not only in terms of human health, but also because of its impact on the global economy. Hyper globalisation has meant that humans are more connected than ever before. The inequalities that underpin globalisation and neo-colonial, neo-liberal capitalism has thus far disproportionately affected those in the ‘Global South’. The scale of immediate economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic is perhaps being felt more strongly now by the ‘Global North’ precisely because the myth of ‘catch – up development’ and perpetual growth is being shattered. Indeed, many communities across the globe have long experienced the negative consequences of hyper globalisation, bearing the brunt of externalised costs in the name of development (Mies, 1993). As Arundhati Roy (2020) says, “The tragedy is immediate, real, epic and unfolding before our eyes. But it isn’t new”. Certainly not for Indigenous and marginalised communities. The destructive environmental activities that underpin capitalist development and a culture of mass consumption, exposes humans to such novel viruses such as COVID-19 and is the “hidden cost of human economic development” (Jones, Patel and Dasak, cited in Vidal, 2020).

Neoliberal globalisation’s stronghold has largely persisted in its power not only through the neocolonial legacies which structure our societies, economies and political systems, but through the colonisation of the mind – that there is no alternative to the current neoliberal capitalist global system. As an Indigenous action zine published by Indigenous Indigenous.action.org (Anonymous, 2020) so aptly puts it “Why can we imagine the ending of the world, yet not the ending of colonialism”? There has been much social commentary around the possibilities that Covid -19 presents in terms of a ‘reset button’ - to reset our economic, social and political realities towards a more equitable world. While cities all over the world have gone into lockdown some have argued that the natural world is taking a much needed ‘breather’ from less carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, clearer water in Venice canals (Clarke, 2020) and pandas in a Hong Kong zoo mating for the first time in 10 years (Linder, 2020). Is this a chance then, to rethink the hyper consumption endless growth model based on exploitation and a culture of ‘death’ (Shiva, 2010)? In going forward, economic alternatives to a

growth economy that employs alternative economic activities will be crucial in ensuring the wellbeing of both collective society and the environment that supports it. There has already been an unintended degrowth of the most damaging sectors of the global economy. There is an opportunity to use this as an economic and social 'reset' (Chassagne, 2020). The most destructive decision that could be made in a post-COVID economic policy decision-making would be to ramp up production in extractive sectors to boost the economy in the short-term. The consequences would be catastrophic. What is needed now is to use this opportunity for long-term thinking towards the sustainable degrowth of the global economy; capitalising on innovation in technology and in mindsets to diffuse alternative economic activities that support what really matters.

In terms of long-term thinking it is time to change the parameters of how we imagine a trajectory going forward. In this article we propose a prefigurative politics of possibility to contest the capitalist imperative that there 'is no alternative' (Amsler, 2016). Prefigurative politics refers to actions "guided by values rather than instrumental efficiency" (Leach, 2013, p.1004). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic providing a possibility to 'reset', it is time to choose, embody and 'prefigure' the kind of future we want for our human community and the planet. Capitalist accumulation has been based on the exploitation and suffering of the less privileged, and the natural environment, and the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted that that the system is also failing those who have thus far benefited from it. A prefigurative approach is based on the principles of "directly implementing the changes one seeks" by "developing counterhegemonic institutions and modes of interaction that embody the desired transformation" (Leach, 2013, p. 1004).

While we wish to prefiguratively work through alternative possibilities that counter hyper mass-consumption we also want to acknowledge that around the world Indigenous and anticolonialist movements have, for a long time, already been enacting alternatives to capitalist globalisation and neo-liberal power. We want to also push these narratives to the foreground of how we can mainstream this counter-hegemonic thinking and practice, not just for social change but "for the immanent creation of a radically other reality" (Amsler, 2016, p.20). Buen Vivir is one such alternative to neo-colonial, neo-liberal economic growth models. Buen Vivir represents a post development alternative, a way of life that prefigures an alternative to capitalist development models.

Buen Vivir has its roots in Latin American Indigenous cosmology, and approximately translates to 'Good Living', or as Vázquez (2012) defines it "living in plenitude". It offers a radical critique of the atomised individualistic culture of high mass consumption by taking a "a communitarian view of wellbeing based on reciprocity and complementarity that valorises indigenous identity and culture, and involves not only human beings but also the natural environment" (Giovannini, 2014, p.71). It has become a prominent concept in constitutional debates and transformations particularly in Bolivia and Ecuador (Vázquez, 2012).

The concept of Buen Vivir has been explored by some scholars in relation to tourism. For example Fischer discusses the way that Buen Vivir has been utilised in a 'post-neoliberal' context for tourism development in Nicaragua, with a national development campaign "Live Clean, Live Healthy, Live Beautiful, Live Well" (called Vivir

Bonito, Vivir Bien) (Fischer, 2019, p. 452). Karst (2017) has explored the notion of Buen Vivir in relation to indigenous perceptions of ecotourism and wellbeing in Bhutan, and considered the implications for tourism that engages with the values of Indigenous cultures. Chassagne and Everingham (2019) and Renkert (2019) have explored how Buen Vivir can enable localised degrowth tourism in communities in the highlands of Ecuador.

In this article we explore the prefiguration of a 'reset' underlined by the principles of degrowth through Buen Vivir. We define degrowth firstly as economic growth that must not surpass the biophysical limits of the planet, and secondly, that human wellbeing takes precedence over the pursuit of wealth (Whitehead, 2013, p. 142). We draw on LaTouche's (2012) premise that *decroissance* (degrowth) does not equal negative growth, but a degrowth of overconsumption and a growth of sectors that are about community wellbeing such as education and sanitation (Acosta, 2012). In the context of tourism, we wish to explore the opportunities might such a reset have on destructive forms of travel that neither benefit local natural environments nor host communities themselves.

Problems with catch-up notions of development, mass consumption and its effects on tourism inequalities

While sustainable tourism has offered a critique of these growth models of tourism, the term is too often greenwashed into sustaining tourism and thus sustaining growth (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018). As Higgins-Desbiolles (2010, p. 125) makes clear; sustainable tourism needs to engage seriously with "the notion of limits that the current culture of consumerism and pro-growth ideology precludes". Even within the language of growth itself, tourism development underpinned by neo-liberal capitalist models often fails to live up to its promise (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015).

Measurements regarding the costs and benefits of tourism have tended to focus on 'objective' measures and indicators that do not question the ways in which they are embedded within capitalist models that privilege growth – much less consider the realities on the ground (Miller & Twing-Ward, 2005). Such measurements also reinforce universalist and positivist models of understanding the diverse and nuanced needs and desires of communities involved in tourism. These top-down approaches to sustainable tourism privilege Western epistemologies which foreground Western culture, while "concomitantly negating and denying legitimacy to the knowledge's and cosmologies of those in and from the South" (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015, p. 3).

It is the silencing of other ways of knowing and being that "provided the fundamental logic which informed the colonial project and which ignored the systems of knowledge built over centuries" by Indigenous groups and other colonised communities in the Global South (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015, p. 3). Drawing on Escobar, Higgins-Desbiolles (2010, p. 125) argues that sustainable approaches to tourism then, need to be unravelled from 'the universalising tendencies of current economic discourse' and instead 'make visible practices of cultural and ecological difference which could serve as the basis of alternatives'.

As Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) points out, the COVID-19 pandemic presents the tourism industry with an opportunity. Human activities will need to change to avoid the worst effects of human-induced climate change. Rather than try to return to ‘business as usual as soon as possible’ COVID-19 presents us with an opportunity to think about our consumption patterns and the unsustainability of the travel industry. Whitzman (2020), discusses the ways that “great pandemics often bring about social reform”. The Black Death from 1347–1351 resulted in improved living conditions for low income workers, and the 1854 cholera epidemic in London led to epidemiologist John Snow establishing the link between clean drinking water and the disease (Whitzman, 2020). What then, can this pandemic teach us about the unsustainability of the culture of high mass consumption, not only in terms of the environment but also human health. We can look to its unintended degrowth and its effects on wellbeing.

An opportunity for new economic thinking

The pandemic has already had a massive effect on the global economy and commodities output. Consequently, economic analyst Lauri Myllyvirta’s (2020) found that the virus may have reduced global emissions by 200Mt Co2 to date; and in China alone coal consumption fell by 36%, and oil refining capacity was reduced by 34%. Without precedence, the COVID-19 pandemic is unleashing uncertainty into the global economy, resulting an unintended ‘degrowth’ of the industrial and extractive sectors. With it, comes opportunity for other more sustainable sectors – alternative tourism being one.

We argue that adopting a Buen Vivir approach to not only tourism, but our everyday lives can lead to degrowth of extractive capitalist industries that promote a ‘culture of death’. We are already seeing an unintended global degrowth from the global shut down of borders, industries and supply chains. It is time to consider other models of living. It is time to acknowledge that the dominance of Eurocentric thinking and systems is not working. Highlighting non-western worldviews and models can help refocus the wellbeing of both people and the environment, in turn influencing how we might not only live differently in our everyday life, but how we do tourism too.

As the COVID-19 pandemic is demonstrating, in times of crisis we focus on what really matters in life: health, social connection, our environment, identity (Chassagne, 2020) – all of these are core focal points of a Buen Vivir approach. Just like the French term *décroissance*, LaTouche’s approach to degrowth, Buen Vivir is about plenitude and enhanced wellbeing, rather than the growth of the economy. Where Buen Vivir differs is that it considers environmental and human health and wellbeing equally. In the wake of COVID-19, this distinction will be pivotal in avoiding such widespread global impacts in times of crisis.

Degrowing the global neoliberal economy while growing wellbeing through Buen Vivir

While the notion of limits poses a fundamental irony for the tourism industry that is embedded within capitalist growth models (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018), we argue that

focusing on Buen Vivir redefines the parameters of how we understand 'limits'. In limiting unsustainable practices in development and tourism, a focus on Buen Vivir actually creates growth in other areas, such as social and environmental wellbeing, and meaningful human connection. We thereby argue that privileging the growth of social and environmental wellbeing under a Buen Vivir approach, results in degrowth, because of the way in which the economy is conceptualised and the shifting of priorities away from an economic growth mentality.

Privileging social and environmental wellbeing, tourism as an alternative economic practice under a Buen Vivir approach supports the degrowth of socially and environmentally damaging sectors (Chassagne & Everingham, 2019). This is vital in a recovering economy, if we are to use this opportunity and shift towards a post-extractive society. The economic aspects of Buen Vivir shift priorities away from economic growth, towards greater social and environmental wellbeing, and meaningful human connection. In other words, we can capitalise on a Buen Vivir approach to continue the degrowth momentum, albeit unintentional, for transformative change in society within the earth's physical limits.

Buen Vivir has been linked to 'hope movements' demonstrating how possibility can be reclaimed from the hopelessness of neoliberal capitalism (Dinerstein & Deneulin, 2012). Hope becomes possible when we move beyond negative critique and "unlearn hegemonic epistemologies, identities, relationships and practices and learning how to create new ones that do not yet exist" (Amsler, 2017, p. 20). In the here and now, in terms of prefiguring global futures we need to decolonise our lives, bodies and spirits to heal each other and the planet (Motta, 2014).

Through crisis comes creativity and challenges to the 'atomised individualism' that underpins travel consumption. Staying closer to home for example, could awaken us to the value of travelling less, staying local and slowing down. (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis has required us to immediately scale down the way we travel and live, to connect more locally, shop locally, and limit consumption to what we need (Chassagne, 2020). As climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe (cited in Chassagne, 2020) said, "What really matters is the same for all of us. It's the health and safety of our friends, our family, our loved ones, our communities, our cities, and our country. That's what the coronavirus threatens..." There is this collective realisation that it can no longer be business-as-usual.

Degrowth and the implications for tourism

COVID-19 will change tourism for the long-term. People will have less disposable income, travel will once again become a luxury, and so the types of tourism not only will change as a consequence, but also as a necessity. There will be more people travelling locally, which will have a significant impact on travel-related environmental impacts. Longer stays at destinations with less frequent travel as opposed to travel as a consumerist activity can also help lessen public health risks in the face of threats from global epidemics or pandemics, as well as strengthen local communities severely impacted by COVID-19.

In helping to refine our understanding of degrowth, Hall (2009, pp. 55-56) citing the 2008 conference Declaration of the First International Conference on Economic Degrowth, reasserts that the process degrowth has certain characteristics, including:

- Quality of life rather than quantity of consumption;
- Basic human needs satisfaction;
- Societal change based individual and collective actions and policies;
- Increased self-sufficiency, free time, unremunerated activity, conviviality, sense of community, and individual and collective health;
- Self-reflection, balance, creativity, flexibility, diversity, good citizenship, generosity, and non-materialism;
- Equity, participatory democracy, respect for human rights, and respect for cultural differences.

In terms of global societal shifts, we have started to witness almost all these characteristics as a consequence of economic, lifestyle, and priority changes during COVID-19 isolation.

People are focusing on quality of life, and consumption patterns have shifted dramatically since January. Similarly, we can see a focus on what it is we actually need for our wellbeing and survival. There has been greater social cohesion and a change from individual needs to the wellbeing of our collective society – both globally and locally, in that, much more conviviality has been demonstrated – bringing communities closer together by being further apart than ever. People are focused on increasing self-sufficiency. One example is the significant increase in the amount of people starting home gardens and bread baking. This is of course dependent on people having more free time, which leads to self-reflection, creativity and non-material needs.

Once the pandemic is over and normal activities return, societal priorities may never return to what they were: individualism, wealth creation, busyness, and high levels of unnecessary consumption. COVID-19 may have played a vital role in finally achieving the transformative change that sustainable development never could. Time will be the crucial factor here.

To that end, tourism can be an alternative economic activity that can help support economic recovery in a sustainable manner by supporting the continual decline or degrowth of the more damaging sectors like extractivism, as well as helping to sustain the societal changes like social cohesion and reduced consumption brought on during peak COVID-19 period. The types of tourism activities will be of importance here. This, of course, will require policies that support a continual, intentional sustainable degrowth post-COVID19.

Tourism as an alternative economic activity under Buen Vivir

In our paper linking Buen Vivir to degrowth and tourism, we highlight Gudynas (2011, p. 446) who conceptualises degrowth neither as a comparison concept to Buen Vivir, nor an objective of Buen Vivir, but rather as a consequence. Gudynas (2011, p. 446) states that while there are several similarities to both concepts, Buen Vivir is

Table 1. Tourism, Buen Vivir and degrowth parallels (Chassagne & Everingham, 2019).

Tourism Practices	Buen Vivir Principles	Degrowth Characteristics
Cultural and knowledge exchange Production and promotion of traditional handicrafts and arts Volunteer tourism	Decolonisation and culture	Quality of life, equity, respect for cultural differences, creativity, diversity, unremunerated activity
Eco and agri-tourism initiatives Community stays	Reciprocity, nature and community	Conviviality, non-materialism, sense of community
Participatory local government initiatives	Plurality, wellbeing and contextuality	Participatory democracy, good citizenship, respect for human rights.

intercultural, biocentric and considers spiritual positions. Considering the unintended degrowth as a result of economic activity during COVID19, a Buen Vivir approach can help support intentional sustainable degrowth going forward.

This approach prescribed by Buen Vivir is supported by Hall's (2009, p. 55) argument for degrowth in sustainable tourism, as degrowth particularly calls for an observation of the principles of equity, participatory democracy, respect for human rights, and respect for cultural differences. Table 1 below demonstrates the parallel between the tourism practices discussed above, the relevant buen vivir principles and the characteristics of degrowth as described by Hall (2009).

Taking a buen vivir approach to degrowth post-COVID degrowth can help extend transformative change to the tourism sector. It will mean rethinking ideals of tourism as means for social cohesion, inclusivity, and wellbeing (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010), creating positive interactions with the environment (Chassagne & Everingham, 2019).

Tourism that is underpinned by buen vivir supporting a sustainable degrowth can have positive impacts for both local communities and tourists alike. Tourism's supporting role in a degrowth society opens possibilities for the growth of intercultural learning and exchange, deeper human connections, and greater sense of reciprocity with the natural environment. This includes slow tourism and forms of ethical tourism which are compatible with some of the principles of degrowth, such as denouncing certain forms of consumption and promoting the sustainable use of resources. However, these 'slow' forms of consumption also require co-operation from consumers, communities, and governments (Hall, 2009).

Possibilities for slow tourism

Life everywhere has slowed down, and this can be an opportunity to engage in slow tourism practices, conducive to the kind of tourism practices supported by the principles of Buen Vivir. For Hall (2009), the slow consumption of tourism can be linked to degrowth and links to the post-development notion of 'rightsizing' through providing economic alternatives to the growth model. Slow tourism is about experiencing a different kind of temporality to that of mass tourism. It is about immersion in a place that can evoke different ways of being in the world - a different kind of logic to hyper-capitalist consumption models, one that values "travel experience as a kind of lived knowledge" (Fullager et al., 2012 p. 4).

The principles of Buen Vivir require these alternatives to be small-scale, local and benefiting local communities to increase the wellbeing for all. Buen vivir necessitates

plural cooperation on all levels to produce knowledge and capabilities that can enact long-term change. Therefore, *buen vivir* is a plural approach that moves away from 'reform' and 'status quo' towards 'transformation' (Dryzek, 1997, p. 12). Degrowth as a consequence of COVID-19 opens possibilities of transformation that a *Buen Vivir* approach can help support.

Adopting the principles of *Buen Vivir* to guide tourism as an alternative economic activity in the wake of COVID-19 could also ensure that host communities receive equitable redistributive socio-economic effects from tourism through strategies that come from slow, informal, and bartered exchanges.

Conclusion

The tourism Alert and Action Forum Statement on COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis clearly articulates that the global tourism industry creates economic dependencies that are not sustainable. Instead diverse economies are needed that are structured around long term community well-being (TAAF, 2020). In this article we have argued that we need to escape from the logic of capital accumulation and decision making as always embedded with the logic of profit. We have drawn on the notion of degrowth as a way to respond to the ecological and social crisis. In prefiguring how tourism can be otherwise we have outlined how concept such as *Buen Vivir* can help us build the foundations for degrowth. .

We see the Covid-19 pandemic as a time to rethink the tourism as a hyper-consumption model. International and domestic travel has been severely impacted by COVID-19 because of isolation and quarantine policies, job losses and public health concerns. This opens opportunities for doing tourism differently in the future. In a post-COVID-19 degrowth society, tourism as an alternative economic practice, that is guided by the principles of *buen vivir* can help support a continual but intentional degrowth of the socially and environmentally damaging sectors of the economy that are damaging to the wellbeing of local communities. Slow tourism that is supported by the principles of *Buen Vivir* for example, is the kind of tourism we propose as an alternative economic practice to the dominant paradigm of capitalism and mass-consumerism.

We have drawn on the concept of *Buen Vivir* as a way of introducing the notion of 'limits', connection to the environment, and being sensitive to the social and environmental context in which tourism is practiced (Chassagne & Everingham, 2019). We have situated *Buen Vivir* within the context of much needed degrowth and argue that rather than focusing on degrowth as a 'lack' - linked to 'sacrifice', a focus on *Buen Vivir* as the growth of planetary well-being can reframe the parameters of how we imagine alternative futures. As Escobar (2004, p. 217) argues, to counter imperial globality, heightened marginalization and the suppression of knowledge and culture of non-western 'others', new logics are needed; 'another world is possible'. What is needed is alternative and dissenting imaginations.

In relation to tourism, the COVID-19 pandemic provides us with an opportunity to reimagine the future of tourism. As the Tourism Action Network COVID-19 statement (TAAF, 2020) so aptly sums up "The movements for social justice have long declared

that ‘another world is possible’ and we have also declared ‘another tourism is possible’. But the world we want to see won’t be given to us; we have to act collectively for it”. The COVID-19 crisis affords us opportunities for working towards a world otherwise. Tourism scholars have a part to play in prefiguring alternative tourism trajectories. With falling consumption patterns and support for economic alternatives, there is an opportunity both politically and publicly to change our lifestyle and the failing economic model that supports it - to shift the focus and create innovation for wellbeing and the environment, over economic growth. COVID-19 has demonstrated that we need to change our priorities, for the sake of humanity. What we have here, is an open door for change.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Dr Phoebe Everingham is an early career researcher and sessional staff member at the University of Newcastle, Australia. She draws on multi-disciplinary perspectives such as human geography, sociology and anthropology and tourism management studies.

Dr Chassagne is a University Associate at the University of Tasmania, Australia. She holds a PhD based on Buen Vivir as an Alternative to Sustainable Development from Swinburne University of Technology's Centre for Social Impact. Dr Chassagne is currently writing a book on the same topic to be published late 2020.

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