Beyond current boundaries in tourism governance: Time to co-design alternative futures with more-than-human others?

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Objectives | Should we challenge dominant anthropocentric practices and frameworks to go beyond current boundaries in tourism governance? The term governance, "long used as a synonym for 'government'" (Walters, 2004, p. 27), alludes to forms of governing in which public and private boundaries 'have become blurred' (Jessop, 1997; Rhodes, 1996; Stoker, 1998; Walters, 2004). For Walters (2004), as societies complexify "political authority has become polycentric and multileveled" (p. 27), hence problems "are more intractable and less amenable to 'top-down' or 'linear' solutions" (p. 40). Acknowledging broader critics of the concept (e.g. Walters, 2004; Rhodes, 1996), governance can represent a political response towards a more "relational and associational understanding of power" (Walters, 2004, p. 33). Over the years, many issues linked to traditional tourism development have been reported (e.g. Fletcher et al., 2021), but policy and governance failures in addressing them persist (Guia, 2021; Matteucci et al., 2021). To answer the question above, this research inquires how posthumanism informs governance frameworks by making them more inclusive, complex and heterogeneous. As such, it aims to discern its transformative potential for politicising non-human actors and supporting the co-creation of non-anthropocentric tourism governance models.

Methodology | For tourism to account for socio-ecological limits, conventional governance archetypes must be overcome, embracing more-than-human ethics. In their systematic review of collaborative governance in tourism, Sentanu et al. (2023) do not mention any non-anthropocentric work, which confirms the necessity of advancing it. By drawing on collaboration, tourism co-design entails "re-imagining and challenging current tourism assumptions" (Duedhal, 2021, p. 452) and "working towards shared goals" (p. 444). Posthuman praxis opens to collaborative knowledge and governance models recognising the interdependencies of human and non-human entities. Thus, this research aims to delineate an approach to implement posthumanist governance frameworks by introducing a well-supported methodology to serve as a reference for future critical investigations in tourism. To achieve this goal, a systematic literature review focusing on collaborative and participative governance in tourism is employed. Unlike the approach taken by Sentanu et al.

(2023), this study aims to delve deeper into ways to effectively integrate non-anthropocentric worldviews into tourism governance.

Main Results and Contributions | This research highlights and critiques the current anthropocentric nature of tourism governance. By doing so, it identifies theoretical gaps in the current literature on tourism governance and sustains emerging trends in critical tourism studies. The study observes a growing interest in (i) implementing collaborative and participative practices in tourism as in social research broadly, but also albeit to a minor extent in (ii) integrating perspectives that embrace posthuman ethics. It suggests incorporating governance mechanisms transcending traditional anthropocentrism and adopting posthuman principles. This can lead to more equitable and lasting decision-making processes.

Limitations | This research is in its early stages and is mostly theoretical in nature. While it has yet to be empirically investigated, it holds significant methodological value in focusing on real-world applications and providing a subaltern and critical posthumanist perspective of tourism governance. Limitations also include potential obstacles in implementing posthumanist co-design in diverse cultural and geographical contexts. Balancing varying interests, including non-human entities' ones, presents practical challenges as the difficulty of "including non-human voices" and of "flattening difference" (Ferrando, 2012, p. 13; citing Luft 2009). Similarly, the review is not all-encompassing, and there may be important works overlooked.

Conclusions | By reframing tourism governance through posthumanism, this research surveys its potential for activating alternative futures. While a common vision and collaboration are deemed essential, the lack of engagement, trust, capacity, and political power among others are considered important limitations in the implementation of collaborative projects (Sentanu et al., 2023). Recognising these issues, posthumanist co-design potential in transforming tourism governance requires serious consideration. This objective may be deemed unattainable without exploring novel methodologies, as indicated by this research findings. In essence, understanding and practicing tourism governance differently requires exploring uncharted territories to find ways of overcoming the challenges we are facing.

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