

Tourism & COVID-19

A Travel & Tourism Destination Well-being Policy and Position Paper: Aligning Institutional Partners to Support Destination Resilience & Recovery

As tourism stakeholders, if we truly value & believe in this life-changing industry, if we want to advocate its merits and ability to deliver the UN SDGs, we need to recognise the imperative to value and measure travel and tourism's contribution to destination well-being.

Travel and tourism are inextricably linked to national and global development, affecting change almost everywhere. Following the devastating impacts of COVID-19 including the industry's loss of some 62 million jobs worldwide there is mounting pressure to recover; to reposition and prioritise the industry in the minds of **all** stakeholders. This repositioning requires a move to evolve the sector and engage the broadest possible alliance, committed to strengthening the industry's ability to deliver the UN SDGs. From a destination perspective, three issues must be addressed, notably: tourism governance, over-crowding and the sector's carbon footprint.

A systemic structural weakness with destination development has been its lack of inclusivity and tendency, over time, to prioritise business and government interests over the needs and concerns of host communities. Moreover, economic objectives associated with travel and tourism growth can undermine the quality of life (QoL) of host communities. Prior to COVID-19, this structural imbalance led to destination over-crowding, which coupled with the sector's carbon footprint are *two of the sector's biggest sustainability threats*.

From a technical position these threats can be addressed if destinations and businesses commit to sector sustainability standards and criteria, and carbon footprint registry and reduction protocols. While businesses and governments are starting to engage in this complex arena, they can be incentivised to move at pace if they are driven by evidence-based public opinion centred upon QoL issues & metrics. As households, communities and economies recover from COVID-19, a concerted global partnership is needed to: (a) engage & drive public interest in the well-being agenda, QoL metrics and the proposition of regenerative, flourishing destinations, and (b) incentivise businesses & governments to embrace destination well-being in their policy and planning frameworks.

Interest in well-being policy and practice is growing on multiple levels, from the individual to the state. Progress is underpinned by the 2011 UN Resolution 65/309 "*Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development*" and ten years' of the UN's annual Global Happiness Reports. Interest is intensifying as individuals and governments contemplate economic restructuring owing to COVID-19. Significantly, the well-being agenda aligns with the UN SDGs; moreover, the inclusion of QoL science, measures and indicators in destination planning, provides a framework and narrative to (a) engage an industry-wide spectrum of stakeholders, (b) embrace well-being scores in destination competitiveness reporting, and (c) for travel and tourism to play a defining role in COVID-19 recovery.

While individual and community (destination) well-being can be scientifically measured, how can the well-being agenda itself be positioned to support travel and tourism's recovery? Perhaps the biggest revolution in travel and tourism data science over the last five years, has been real-time often demand side data collated from social media, on-line booking platforms and other personal mobile device-related data. These innovations feed especially NTOs,

DMOs and big business. Focusing upon visitor experiences, they often support, for example, niche-marketing, transport planning and opportunities for product development and business growth. In brief, they further empower business and government and, if not well managed, can add to the vulnerability of host communities, which in-turn undermines inclusive destination development.

To promote more inclusive, evidence-based approaches to responsible development and regenerative growth, tourism governance requires access to more holistic data, providing 360-degree insights into not just visitor and industry data, but also the social, environmental and health conditions, sentiments and aspirations of host communities. Through objective and subjective measures, QoL data can be harvested to engage communities and civil society groups in well-being conversations, as well as the role that travel, tourism and hospitality can play in strengthening destination well-being. Such innovation is needed to support industry restructuring already underway with its emphasis upon domestic tourism as well as event management, product innovation and alternative travel experiences brought about by COVID-19 and the climate change imperative.

Significantly, QoL data is also required by governments to enable them to rebuild and deliver listening, caring and inclusive societies and economies. Following the impacts of COVID-19, psychological, social and economic vulnerability are already emerging as pressing issues to manage. Hence the travel and tourism industry can position itself to call for this data, thereby: (a) elevating its political profile; (b) supporting its own regeneration; (c) breathing new life into tourism governance systems; and (d) placing people, neighbourhood, community & destination well-being front and centre, at the heart of destination planning processes. Such an approach could be launched with particular emphasis placed upon the well-being of the 62 million sector workers to have lost their jobs and incomes: including those supporting the planet's national parks and protected areas embracing ecosystems and wildlife assets that travel and tourism have supported, that are critical to the planet and that are threatened by the industry's collapse.

At the destination level, the potential of this travel and tourism, big data and good governance process, with its ability to engage governments, civil society groups and business, can be accelerated through the application of AI-enhanced, multi-facing dashboards designed to (a) provide graphic representations of (tourism and) well-being data by target group, (b) enable the co-creation of policies and interventions across government departments in partnership with civil society groups, (c) focus upon the needs of vulnerable groups, and (d) run policy and intervention scenarios predicting well-being outcomes that maximise win-win scenarios. These multi-purpose, multi-facing dashboards can be applied to both tourism and non-tourism systems. With this agenda, the travel and tourism industry can position itself front and centre, (a) advocating greater inclusivity, well-being equality and planetary balance, (b) re-advocating itself as a life- and planet-changing people centred industry, and (c) emphasising the sector's deep commitment to the UN SDGs.

To advance the proposition advocated herein, a roundtable webinar with selected participants will be convened to articulate an action plan for its implementation. Details of Planet Happiness and its use of the Happiness Index survey to help achieve the objectives herein are attached.



[Planet Happiness](#) is a tourism and big data project of the [Happiness Alliance](#). Our mission is to focus the attention of all tourism stakeholders on the well-being agenda and use tourism as a vehicle for development that demonstrably strengthens destination sustainability and the quality of life of host communities. The project provides a narrative for the industry's billions of stakeholders to comprehend and engage with the happiness, well-being and quality of life agenda, and to move our measure of progress and development *Beyond GDP*, with its narrow emphasis upon economic metrics. Our mission and approach to supporting destination well-being, is well-known to, and advocated by, WTTC, UNWTO and GSTC.

Our Planet Happiness ten-step approach:

- measures the well-being and quality of life of residents living in World Heritage sites and beyond;
- helps destinations advance their competitive edge through more inclusive, more responsible and more purposeful tourism planning;
- uses the on-line, state-of-the-art [Happiness Index survey](#) that:
 - is based on Bhutan's pioneering approach to measuring Gross National Happiness;
 - is an OECD recognised and scientifically valid, comprehensive tool providing a direct experience of how well-being is measured;
 - is available in 24 languages and counting;
 - enables and assists destinations to measure movement towards the UN SDGs.

The Well-being Pragmatic Shift: 11 Domains of Happiness



The Happiness Index measures individual and destination well-being across 11 domains. It includes questions measuring satisfaction with the way tourism is developing, that are centred around the way tourism is included in the UN SDGs.

Each destination receives a unique URL allowing questions to be added to localise the survey. Questions can be added to engage stakeholders in discussions, steps and decision-making to reduce the destination's carbon footprint, or focus upon resident-wildlife conflict issues, for example.

Working with our destination partners we analyse data to produce one-page destination scorecards and in-depth data-rich reports, sparking conversations about tourism and destination well-being and how this relationship can be measured and strengthened.

A 2.5-minute video introducing our work, [is here](#).