

What do we talk about when we talk about sustainability?

Conceptualising sustainable tourism in post-pandemic Greenland

Elizabeth Cooper
PhD Fellow
Copenhagen Business School, Denmark

Sustainable Tourism in Greenland: A conceptual map

Problem: After the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic, Greenland's tourism industry needs to be rebuilt in a sustainable and resilient way. This requires a better understanding of how sustainable tourism is perceived in Greenland - because it will only truly work if local stakeholders are on board. Morality and ethics in tourism are more important than ever, and the relationship between these and sustainability needs to be explored in more depth.

Research Questions:

- How is sustainable tourism conceptualised and discussed in the context of Greenland?
- How can these findings contribute to an ethical tourism landscape post-pandemic (both in Greenland and elsewhere)?

Why *Greenland*? Greenland offers some interesting paradoxes in relation to sustainability, e.g. being a vegetarian in Greenland is not sustainable.

Literature review:

- Scholarly debate on sustainable tourism so far has been cyclical and has not made significant progress. There is no such thing as sustainable tourism - in that, you cannot separate the concept of sustainable tourism from the concept of tourism as a whole.
- Scholars call for tourism as a whole to be more human, answerable to societal context and ethical. But tourism shouldn't *be* changed, it should *create* change. Tourism should be an active tool to change society for the better.

Methodology:

- 39 semi-structured interviews were conducted with tourism stakeholders in Greenland in summer 2020.
- The interviews were transcribed and coded to draw out aspects of sustainable tourism.
- The aspects were organised according to their level of abstraction, and grouped together to form the conceptual map opposite.

Findings:

- Perceptions of sustainable tourism are highly subjective, complex, context-specific and dynamic.
- Understandings of sustainable tourism in Greenland are linked to many other complex societal themes, including:
 - culture, indigeneity, governance, entrepreneurship
 - justice – e.g. how to distribute income and income opportunities
 - equity and ethics – and we can use ethics to justify the imbalances inevitably present within tourism
 - COVID-19 - the pandemic emphasises the significance of ethics and makes it more important and easy to be humane towards each other.
- We should abandon attempts to define ‘sustainable tourism’ as separate from tourism as a whole.
- Tourism in general should be reframed as sustainable, or more appropriately, ethical, and then analysed within its local context to draw out **advantages**, **obstacles**, and **priorities** to ethical tourism. This avoids definitive statements about what the phenomenon *is* and focuses instead on the things that enable it, limit it and should be prioritised in its pursuit.
- The priorities identified in the Greenlandic context are represented by the large circles on the conceptual map.
- These need exploring in further depth but they offer starting points for operationalising ethical tourism in Greenland.
- Developing ethical tourism in Greenland may be easier than in some other destinations because of certain contextual factors.

Next steps: How can I use my findings to draw out sustainable behaviours to promote in Greenland? What kind of field experiments can I design to try and promote these behaviours?

