Restoring the balance between humanity and nature through tourism entrepreneurship: a conceptual framework

Katie Lupton and Christine Samy

Katie Lupton and Christine Samy are both based at the Leeds Trinity University, Leeds, UK.

Abstract

Purpose – For years, there has been an appalling crisis developing – that of the state of our planet. Humanity has become disconnected from nature, with devastating consequences. We are in an emergency state: a crisis of perception (HRH et al., 2010, p. 6). This paper puts forward a conceptual model for harmony restoration through tourism entrepreneurship.

Design/methodology/approach – In developing the proposed framework, the authors have adopted the seven core principles of Richard Dunne of the Harmony Project, inspired by HRH The Prince of Wales's vision set out in his book "Harmony: A new way of looking at our world". The authors propose that developing entrepreneurial tourism in respect of the harmony principles would enhance the industry and act as a platform to educate those that engage with it.

Findings – In this conceptual viewpoint paper, the authors draw upon the harmony principles to provide a cohesive framework for restoring harmony through entrepreneurship in tourism. The premise of our framework is that for the tourism industry to become more regenerative and transformative, it requires the continuing contributions of the entrepreneurs involved (De Lange and Dodds, 2017; Kirby, 2020).

Originality/value – The suggested framework builds on the work of David Kirby (2020) and epitomises a step toward harmony restoration through tourism and entrepreneurship, thus contributing to future research seeking to explore a novel and encircling approach to regeneration and tourism entrepreneurship. The paper provides a foundation for policy making to promote harmonious entrepreneurship practices in the tourism field.

Keywords Tourism, Entrepreneurship, Harmony, Regeneration

Paper type Viewpoint

Harmony and tourism

> Harmony is an expression of wholeness, a way of looking at ourselves and the world of which we are part. It is about connections and relationships. The emotional, intellectual and physical are all connected. We are connected to our environments, both built and natural and all the parts of our communities and their environments are connected, too. Harmony asks questions about relationship, justice, fairness and respect in economic, social and political relationships. As an integrative discipline, it can be expressed in ideas and practice.

(David Cadman, 2017).

The principles of harmony exist in the natural world that "*produce the active state of balance which is just as vital to the health of the natural world as it is for human society*" (HRH *et al.*, 2010, p. 5). The six principles, interdependence, the cycle, geometry, diversity, adaptation and health (see Table 1), are united and bound by the final principle of oneness. These principles highlighted by HRH The Prince of Wales are to achieve a revolutionary shift in mindset towards sustainability and regenerative action. More recently, philanthropist and educator David Kirby set up the Harmonious Entrepreneurship Society to promote harmonious approaches to entrepreneurship to address the sustainability goals.

The complex relationship between humanity and nature is perhaps none more evident than in the tourism industry, which has encouraged exploitative behaviour in return for economic growth and development, leaving dramatic consequences and a damaging legacy. Tourism's relationship with nature has become indefensibly unbalanced. Despite being wholly reliant on social and natural capital for developing lasting connections to places (Epler Wood *et al.*, 2019) and for attracting visitors (Leon *et al.*, 2014), the industry paradoxically often overlooks its accountability for adverse impacts and the subsequent costs to such significant assets. Therefore, tourism's so-called "invisible burden" leaves the industry "on a shaky foundation that could crack under its own weight" (Epler Wood *et al.*, 2019, p. 2). There is undoubtedly a dark side to tourism. Still, with an integrated view of tourism that recognises the centrality of nature within policy and practice, the industry can contribute to future sustainable development.

The principles of harmony exist in the natural world: interdependence, the cycle, geometry and patterns, diversity, adaptation, health and oneness. These principles have already been applied within education and learning (Dunne and Martin, 2020) as a means of responding to social challenges (Parker, 2020) and business, entrepreneurship and the circular economy (Goyder, 2020; Kirby, 2020; MacArthur, 2020). This paper argues for a more holistic approach to applying harmony within tourism through developing a framework for tourism entrepreneurship which would positively impact individuals, destinations and communities and contribute to harmony restoration.

Why harmony, why now?

We have less than ten years to address the global goals set out in Agenda 2030 and meet the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement demands. We should now consider ourselves in a state of crisis, a crisis that is the consequence of humanity's disconnection to nature; *"we have systematically severed ourselves from Nature and the importance to us to everything else on Earth, of her processes and cyclical economy"* (HRH *et al.*, 2010, p. 19). We have long ignored calls for a societal shift in attitude and increased connections to nature which are visible as early as the mid-twentieth century (Leopold, 1949). The risks to the future state of the planet mean we now face an urgent need for humanity to adopt a more holistic worldview, one based on a more profound understanding and (re)connections to nature. The concept of harmony offers a new way of thinking that reflects a shift in mindset toward a systems-based view of nature and its relationship with humanity, reinforcing that we *are* nature (HRH *et al.*, 2010).

Table 1	The seven principles of harmony
Principle	*Description*
Interdependence	The recognition that humanity exists as part of broader ecosystems and that one element within an ecosystem supports the health and wellbeing of the wider community. It is no longer sufficient to consider survival of the fittest but cooperation among the collective
The cycle	A systems-based view of the world recognises that growth, prosperity, decline, and regeneration are part of the natural order of cycles. An appreciation of cycles teaches the reduction of waste; consume less and conserve more.
Diversity	Nature embraces diversity as a means of strength, resilience, and enrichment
Adaptation	Nature is in a constant state of flux, ever-changing and evolving to meet the demands of a changing environment. Adaptation concerns designing for the future: taking learnings from the past and present to build resilience critical for future survival
Health	A transformation in behaviour must reflect that the health of humanity is bound to the health of nature. Nature constantly restores and regenerates. Human activity such as exploiting natural resources damages nature and harms human health
Geometry	When the world is viewed through the symmetry and patterns of nature, an appreciation of the connectivity between life and nature is developed
Oneness	The recognition that life on Earth, including humanity, is part of something greater. This principle unites all the others in recognition of their interdependence and connectivity

Source(s): Adapted from HRH *et al.* (2010)

Notwithstanding the catastrophic impacts, the global pandemic presented the tourism industry with an opportunity to change and "*embrace the holistic paradigms and practices waiting on the margins*" (Ateljevic, 2020, p. 468) and rebuild with a greater emphasis on sustainability (WTTC, 2021). With pre-pandemic international tourism arrivals exceeding 1 billion (UNCTAD, 2020), the industry has the scope to assert considerable influence over a sizeable audience, offering a unique opportunity to be a catalyst for transformative change. We suggest that harmony provides a context for exploring regenerative tourism, reconnecting humankind to nature, and contributing to the redressal of the balance of natural order.

Tourism and entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurs are the life force of regional economies and development (Calero and Turner, 2020; Fu *et al.*, 2018). Entrepreneurs are crucial to developing community capital and creating thriving places to live, work and play as vehicles for innovation. They have a critical role in contributing to sustainable development (UNCTAD, 2020) with a significant capacity to contribute to pro-social and pro-environmental behaviour. Within tourism, many social entrepreneurs contribute to society (De Lange and Dodds, 2017), acting as *"change agents of social and economic progress"* (Ateljevic *et al.*, 2016, p. 19). As Sheldon *et al*. (2017) state, "*a social entrepreneur can be simply defined as one who uses business principles to solve social problems*".

Embedded in local communities, they are the backbone of the tourism industry, acting as champions for local culture and the natural environment. Sheldon *et al*. (2017) maintain that the tourism industry *"is ripe with opportunities for social entrepreneurs to move the industry forward and impact destinations in transformative ways*." Tourist-host encounters and interactions mean entrepreneurs are often fundamental touchpoints within tourist experiences. Such encounters provide opportunities for learning through sharing stories, culture, and traditions and reconnecting tourists to nature. As such, entrepreneurs have the potential to transform societies and facilitate broader social change.
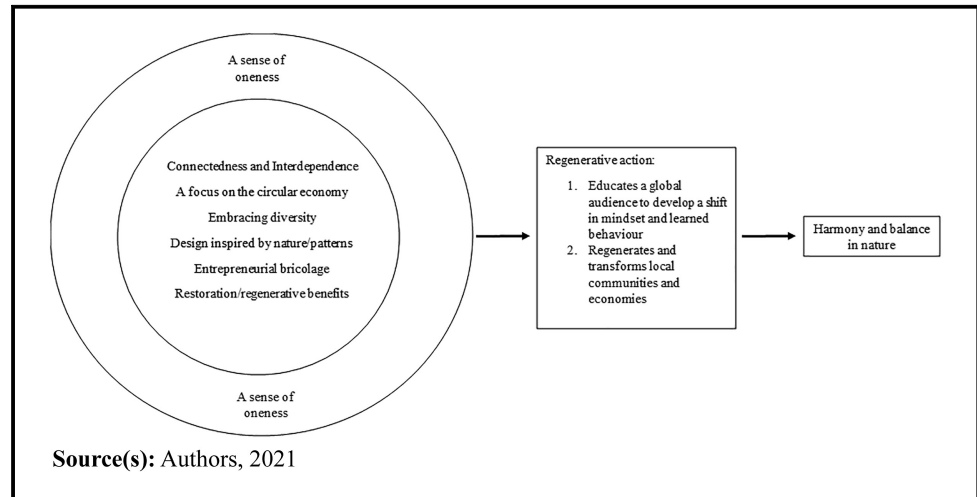
Harmony through entrepreneurship in tourism (HET)

The significance of entrepreneurs to tourism means they present an unequivocal opportunity for impact and incite change, yet scholars claim tourism entrepreneurship studies lack explicit conceptual frameworks (Fu *et al.*, 2018). The HET framework (Figure 1) attempts to harness entrepreneurs' power within tourism for cumulative collective action. The framework adapts the principles of harmony to entrepreneurship within tourism: an emphasis on the circular economy, a design that reflects nature, recognition and promotion of connectedness and interdependence, embraces diversity, demonstrates the ability to adapt and act as bricoleur, generates restorative benefits, and promoting a sense of oneness should be considered as part of an interconnected and collective whole. The HET framework proposes that entrepreneurship in tourism in respect of the harmony principles would deliver cyclical regenerative action by contributing to thriving destinations and communities and acting as a platform from which to educate those who engage with it. Akin to the application within formal education, tourists' exposure to these principles through entrepreneurship in tourism may contribute to a broader societal shift in mindset, ultimately contributing to the regeneration of nature and thus harmony restoration.

Harmony principles and regenerative tourism

Principle 1: a focus on the cyclical thinking – embracing the circular economy

Cyclical thinking and a circular economy require a shift away from what has become more "extractive" forms of capitalism toward more "attractive capitalism" with stewardship and conservation at its heart (Goyder, 2020, p. 539). In a shift away from traditional economic thinking (make, use, dispose of), a circular economy focuses on maximising the life cycle, then recovering or regenerating.

A sense of oneness

Connectedness and Interdependence
A focus on the circular economy
Embracing diversity
Design inspired by nature/patterns
Entrepreneurial bricolage
Restoration/regenerative benefits

A sense of oneness

Regenerative action:
1. Educates a global audience to develop a shift in mindset and learned behaviour
2. Regenerates and transforms local communities and economies

Harmony and balance in nature

Source(s): Authors, 2021

Regeneration and transformation can be achieved through:

1. Tourism entrepreneurs embrace the "local" to maximise economic linkages and minimise leakage: i.e. focussing on seasonal, organic and local produce from smaller providers, using homegrown ingredients and fair-trade products where possible.

2. Entrepreneurs embrace cyclical thinking to minimise waste, i.e. restaurants adopting a nose-to-tail philosophy when preparing dishes or accommodation providers using waste heat from diesel generators to heat water tanks for hot water in hotel bedrooms.

3. Tourists have opportunities to engage with seasonal work such as harvesting and recycling materials.

4. An inclusive economy that focuses on local produce and providers and nurtures provenance of food and regenerative agricultural practice.

5. Regional resilience through local entrepreneurs' initiatives is at the heart of the local economy.

6. Tourist experiences influence the development of moral behaviour with the "opportunity to play a positive role in helping to solve global environmental problems by providing environmental education experiences that promote a fundamental change in people's everyday behaviour and lifestyle" (Ballantyne and Packer, 2011, p. 202).

7. Reconnections to nature result in pro-environmental behaviour, including minimising waste, recycling, and reusing materials, contributing to environmental sustainability through improved pro-environmental practice.

Principle 2: designs that reflect patterns and geometry of nature

Human civilisation is rooted in the "grammar of harmony". The sacred geometry and life patterns are part of nature (HRH *et al.*, 2010, p. 89). From ancient Egypt, humankind has long based its architecture, language, education and culture around the designs and patterns of nature. For example, in hotels, the design of rooms should be rooted firmly in the surrounding nature. Entrepreneurs in tourism highlight such synergies to nature through physical artefacts and architecture, indicating such details through conversation and storytelling and evident in interpretation material.

Regeneration and transformation can be achieved through:

1. Aesthetic regeneration of local communities and development of civic pride.

2. A strong sense of place identity maintains local culture and traditions and contributes to environmental sustainability.

3. Balance in individuals (and thus nature) is restored as the patterns of nature subconsciously bring peace with stronger connections to nature.

Principle 3: demonstration of connectedness and interdependence

Acknowledging our connection to nature and our interdependence on one another for survival leads to harmony. A recognition that all life is connected and that healthy ecosystems equate to healthy communities may be the basis for encouraging more sustainable behaviour. Tourism entrepreneurs operate within an ecosystem in which each is dependent on one another for success – competition becomes coopetition. Harmony would see an interconnected tourism destination where entrepreneurs develop local, regional, national and global networks. Entrepreneurs should encourage opportunities for tourists to create cultural, social, aesthetic, spiritual and recreational values of nature.

Regeneration and transformation can be achieved through:

1. Networks enable research development, knowledge exchange, collaborative policymaking, and intercultural and cross-sector learning.

2. Experiences in nature develop tourists' values and connections to it. More significant links to nature have generated more remarkable pro-environmental behaviour (MENE, 2020).

Principle 4: diversity embraced

Nature celebrates (bio)diversity – species, variety, colours. Evolution in nature generates diversity creating abundance and a sense of cooperation. Diversity within harmony reflects gender and race equality and provides women and marginalised communities access to opportunities. Entrepreneurs need to embody diversity and inclusion strategies in their endeavours.

Regeneration and transformation can be achieved through:

1. Social enterprises allow locals to maintain traditions and develop conservationist attitudes towards nature.

2. An integrated local economy within which marginalised populations are embraced and can participate.

3. Harmony develops through a sense of cooperation over competition and working with nature rather than against it.

Principle 5: ability to adapt and act as a bricoleur

Nature is in a constant state of flux, continually evolving and adapting in pursuit of survival. Tourists should be exposed to stories of ancient wisdom, depicting how things were in the past and what they might look like in the future. Entrepreneurs should highlight local traditions, local events and architecture and participate in developing a unified vision for the future of their place and space.

Regeneration and transformation can be achieved through:

1. Cultural bricolage, authenticity and uniqueness contribute to destination longevity.

2. A sense of local identity develops, increasing civic pride and the maintenance of traditions and local culture.

3. Awareness of climate change increases through demonstrating local impacts.

4. Individuals to understand pro-environmental behaviour and commit to pro-environmental action

Principle 6: production of restorative benefits

Tourism is associated with restorative health and wellbeing benefits for tourists. Entrepreneurs should be mindful of creating opportunities for tourists to focus on health and wellbeing and spirituality, allowing space for reflection, i.e. offering guests the opportunity for a digital detox.

Regeneration and transformation can be achieved through:

1. A healthy natural environment benefits mental and physical health and contributes to a well-balanced society.

2. Tourists develop an appreciation of the cultural values of nature, the aesthetic and the inspirational capital nature provides.

3. Tourists connect to nature through their experiences.

Principle 7: promotion of a sense of oneness in themselves and amongst tourists

Harmony requires self-awareness and reflection on being a part of something greater; humanity is nature and not separate from it. Disconnection from nature has come at the detriment of the environment and society. Entrepreneurs are the touchpoints of tourism, connecting with people by sharing stories and experiences and providing tourists with space to explore. Entrepreneurs recognise they work as part of a broader ecosystem, both at the destination level, within the industry and more widely as part of nature. These connections demonstrate the effect of damage to the natural environment and for tourists to consider their place as part of nature.

Regeneration and transformation can be achieved through:

1. Local ecosystems in the form of networks provide an inclusive and collaborative tourism destination.

2. Communities benefit from entrepreneurial consideration and participation in tourism development planning and policy.

3. (Re)connections with nature restored, encouraging greater pro-environmental and pro-social behaviour.

The future

As we fast approach the limits of nature, we "face a moment of truth", a moment where we must choose to listen and act or face "digging our own graves" (Guterres, 2021). This message should resonate with tourism entrepreneurs whose success depends heavily on nature. The future of tourism *is* the future of nature. The global pandemic has undoubtedly been devastating for tourism, yet with this came a unique opportunity to rethink and reset the future of tourism. To move forward, we need to glance back, to revisit the ancient philosophies that drew wisdom from nature, those that acknowledge the interconnectivity of life and underpin the idea of transformation.

Adopting the principles of harmony in the proposed HET framework may be pivotal in driving regenerative tourism, seeing tourism contribute to the development of thriving destinations and communities and a restoration of balance in nature: harmony. Tourism entrepreneurs incorporating the harmony principles can reach a broad audience to highlight the wonders of nature, reconnect people to nature and influence behavioural action and serve as the early adopters of the new regenerative economy (Sheldon, 2021; Sheldon and Daniele, 2016). Correspondingly, tourists' exposure to these principles may contribute to a broader societal shift in mindset achieving a more harmonious society and thus having a restorative impact. As Sheldon (2021) states, *"regenerative tourism heals damaged destination resources and contributes to thriving host communities. Each destination's regenerative path is unique and cannot easily be tracked by a standard set of indicators"*.

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Corresponding author

Katie Lupton can be contacted at: k.lupton@leedstrinity.ac.uk