



Tourism and independence: beyond neoliberalism and dependency a community-based tourism proposal for Kurdistan

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the Kurdistan region and suggests a tourism strategy that enhances the region's chances to achieve local control of the sector as well as its resources for sovereignty. It argues that if tourism is based on CBT approaches, it can contribute to the achievement of both economic independence and social justice without losing them to foreign investors or local elites. This paper is based on secondary data such as peer reviewed academic articles and popular journal etc. Wars and conflicts have jeopardized Iraqi Kurdistan's tourism potential. However, given current episodes of stability, the scope for tourism is vast including the practice of Community-Based Tourism. Laws are being amended by the Government to create conditions for both domestic and foreign investment in the tourism and other sectors. However, for these investments to bear fruit, training of employees at all levels is imperative for the region. This paper argues that the growth of CBT itself worldwide, is important and should also be practised in Kurdistan on a large scale. This can be done by linking tourism companies to CBT ventures and/or assisting CBT ventures themselves to develop and grow. This calls for specific incentives and facilitation from government and other stakeholders while supporting and promoting CBT in both urban and rural areas for its impacts to be widespread and extensive.

Keywords: tourism; independence; Kurdistan; community-based tourism; social justice

'...non vi può essere vera libertà senza la giustizia sociale, come non vi può essere vera giustizia sociale senza libertà'

[...it is not possible to have true freedom without social justice, the same that it is no possible to have social justice without freedom]

(Sandro Pertini, Former Italian President).

Introduction

War and conflicts have severe negative impacts on the tourism sector. Tourism is one of the most inescapable socio-economic and political occurrences shared around the world. It is influenced, positively or negatively, by political vicissitudes: yet territorial, religious, and other kinds of conflicts and wars continue to impact tourism in various ways (Timothy, 2013:12). In literature, it is acknowledged that the tourism is a global leading sector. While it is not necessarily the leading global industry, it certainly is an important human activity (Lew, 2011:148). By virtue of being one of fastest growing industries, tourism is being used by many countries as an attractive economic development strategy (Uzar & Eyuboglu, 2019:822).



However, the tourism sector, as most of the global economy, is embedded and working within a neoliberal framework. The tourism sector is facilitating the processes of globalization while upholding neo-liberalism (Lapointe, Sarrasin & Benjamin, 2018:31) and at the same time deepening inequity and injustice (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019:16). The sector continues to produce economic, social and environmental problems and regional and class inequalities (Tosun, Timothy & Öztürk, 2003:133). Specifically, in the developing world, tourism seems to be working against the local and disadvantaged sections of society where its benefits are not visible and cannot be ascertained after entertaining, taking care of and providing accommodation and other services to the visitors. Local communities do not have much to show for it even after doing this for many years – from generation to generation because of exploitation.

United Nations document (UN, 2019:XXI) observes that liberalisation of trade and finance are widening income and wealth gaps between countries to the extent of undermining countries' sovereignties. If the *status quo* continues, global inequalities are poised to increase (Alvaredo et al., 2018:13). At the same time, neoliberal discourses disregard redistribution to disadvantaged groups or individuals as this is considered creating a dependency culture (Mosedale, 2016:9). Tourism critique "has been pushed into the domain of the 'underdogs' and is often rejected as unqualified, unscholarly, polemic or 'anti-development'" (Pleumaron, 2012:46).

Instead, tourism should engage the broad political debates related to poverty, inequality, the environment and climate change in a context of globalization (Pleumaron, 2012:46). Tourism is about politics and 'the essence of politics is struggle' however most researchers do not see it that way or elect to ignore it (Pleumaron, 2012:46; Hall in Pleumaron, 2012:46). This article challenges the current discourses to enact a movement from an 'academy of hope' to a project that is emancipatory in substance (Bianchi, 2009:489) which also leads to the control of the tourism sector by local, disadvantaged people. There is no active debate on the political economy of tourism that places local peoples struggles for equity and social justice at the centre of those debates (Pleumaron, 2012:46). There are alternatives to the capitalist model of the market system with wider scope for alternative globalisation and alternative tourisms (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008:360; Nicolaidis, 2016) and Hotel Bauen is one example (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2012:19). It therefore, seems obvious that new solutions need to be excogitated, advanced and implemented to make tourism a force that reduces inequality, poverty and works towards social justice. It can be correctly said (arguably a lapalissade) if neoliberalism caused social inequalities, it cannot be neoliberalism that solves them (Scheyvens & Hughes, 2019:1065). There ought to be other alternatives to all man-made systems that benefit a few at the detriment of many. Markets do not care about poverty and inequality.

It is not the aim of this article to emphasize or write the history of Kurdistan, and or its people's request to have his or her own country. The Kurdistan region still "seethes with tension and discontent as the Kurdish nation has been waiting too long for its turn to be emancipated" (Tsafrir, 2015:457). There are about twenty-five million Kurds around the borders of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria making them "the most populous people on earth without a nation-state" (Gavlin, 2015:57; however, the exact number is not clear see Tsafrir, 2015:454). It is a global message that needs to be relayed about Kurdistan's independence as "The world owes a great moral debt to the Kurds, and paying it once and for all would also be beneficial to the restoration of regional equilibrium" (Tsafrir, 2015:458). This paper proposes the adoption of a CBT approach in Kurdistan as a way to work towards enhanced chances of autonomy. In this context, this paper sees linkages between issues of social justice, nation-recognition and self-determination that can serve Kurdistan. Fraser (1998) observes that social justice can be linked to claims for redistribution and claims for recognition.

Thus, theorists agree that recognition is a dimension of justice that cannot be reduced to mere distribution of wealth, income and social opportunity and, thus it amends theories of distributive



justice. There is also agreement that remedy for injustice of misrecognition or non-recognition involves giving respect to cultural identities of those who had been denigrated by dominant groups or state such that justice-as-recognition will allow for the affirmation of minority groups to a shared social life and the formal recognition of their rights to autonomy and self-determination (Williams, 2014:4).

This article, lean to give greater independence and autonomy to Kurdistan. In this direction this article proposes a specific tourism development strategy embedded in CBT principles and characteristics that could be valuable to favor Kurdistan autonomy and local control of its tourism sector and tourism resources (landscape, culture and so on). In Kurdistan areas still in conflict, tourism is not a prevalent issue, however in peaceful Kurdistan areas tourism has lots of potential. This paper proposes a strategy on how the Kurdistan region could advance in all their territories a coordinated tourism strategy that enhances their chance to local control of its tourism sector and tourism resources. It argues that when tourism is based on a CBT approach, it can contribute to independence and social justice by not 'selling out' its tourism resources to foreign investors or to the local elite. This article is not saying that conventional tourism should disappear or be completely transformed into a CBT type of business overnight (at least this is not possible in the short term, but it should be the long-term direction and aspiration). It proposes to move conventional and arguably many types of so called alternative tourism businesses in the direction of CBT to eventually go through the stages leading to CBT as the main (and possibly sole) tourism approach. At the same time incentive need to be advanced to also favour the adoption of CBT principles by conventional tourism such large hotel chains such as Hilton, Sheraton, Holiday Inn. Diversification of tourism products and services anchored and based on CBT principles should be the final aim.

Literature Review

Tourism, neoliberalism and local control

Tourism remains nested in neoliberalism and, as such, in many countries its growth is linked to neoliberal policies that support private property, free trade and free markets such in a context of privatisation and liberalisation, which has seen local people losing their resources including land through these processes (Marx, 2018:20). Within this context, the question to ask is to whom the benefits of tourism have gone the most (Britton, 1981:19). Put differently, "who gets what, when, where, and how" (Sofield, 2003:92).

Certainly, the tourism sector works in a neoliberal global economy (Chok, Macbeth & Warren, 2007:144). Within this context, two assumptions have been proposed that growth in tourism leads to economic growth and that economic growth in turn reduces poverty (Gartner & Cukier, 2012). Instead, there are no empirical data that show the contribution of tourism to poverty reduction at the individual level because the assumption is that they will benefit through the trickle-down processes (Holden, Sonne & Novelli, 2011:317). The assumed positive relation between tourism and poverty alleviation is doubtful and under specific conditions, tourism can also increase poverty (Gartner & Cukier, 2012:561; see also on similar issues Saayman, Rossouw & Krugell, 2012; Holden, Sonne & Novelli, 2011:331). Furthermore, tourism has exacerbated social inequalities (Cole & Morgan, 2010:XV). As such, tourism can be seen "as a force of neo-colonialism" (Page et al., 2001:397). Tourism shows the hallmarks of neo-colonialism and economic dependency in which Western firms control the travel business in under-developed countries through exploitation reflecting 'dependent development' in those countries (Andriotis, 2002:76). Small local firms have no chance to compete with big multinational firms in a context of an uneven playing field.

The consequences of increasing private capital in tourism is loss of control to overseas interests and local elite (for more about local elite/class bonds in capitalism and friendly mechanisms, see Lord Acton 1955 in Baran, 1962:221). Mass tourism has links to agricultural



plantation structures of the colonial times (Bianchi, 2002:270). Lefebvre (2002: 325) suggests that tourism is part of the survival strategy of capitalism reasoning that capitalism depends for its survival on reaching new space, land, absorbing towns and agriculture and creating a new sector – leisure. In this context, it is important to ask if mass tourism is associated with economic growth and development, then why are many tourist destinations in developing countries still endure poverty, inequality and dependency? (Khan, 1997: 989).

This following text will reflect on the loss of control suffered by local communities and issues of inequality that ensue. Neoliberalism favours large companies, that avoid taxes and resort to the commodification of customary (owned) land where large scale developers can restrict access (Tolkach & King, 2015:389). Large companies also have no links with local industries and favour foreign staff during recruitment (Tolkach & King, 2015:389).

All these processes have resulted in the alienation of local residents in the host country (Guo, Jiang & Li, 2019:9). Thus external forces, have the financial and human resources, to sideline local actors in their pursuit of profit (Saayman & Giampiccoli, 2016:163). For Britton (in Pearce, 1989:94) capital accumulation is goes up the hierarchy. Within a diffusion context linked to capitalist western based concepts of development (development stage theory), the main point is that development happens in stage and is diffused from “the core to the periphery” (Telfer, 2002:123). Thus the evolutionary structure of the supply side of tourism in the diffusion paradigm is fundamental in which control initially resides with locals but with the entry of multinational firms, that control is lost (Telfer, 2002:123).

Diffusion is related to both geographical locations and industrial sectors in terms of the movement from the core to the periphery. There should be room for the creation of local indigenous role models as opposed to window dressing and using foreign models that may not fit into local community structures (Sofield, 2003:88). Diffusion, dependency and neoliberalism impose penalties and disadvantage on local contexts, thus it is ambiguous to use tourism as a development tool for disadvantaged communities in developing countries. This is because areas that are involved in tourism are introduced and framed within a dependency framework influenced and controlled by international hegemony (Giampiccoli, 2010:93). This can be seen in each locality by following the stage-theory that promotes augmented dependency that is external to each locality by the diffusion process, encouraging the spreading of the ‘tourism area lifecycle’ to broader spaces (Giampiccoli, 2010:93). Britton (1982:355) observes that the international tourist industry pushes for a development mode that creates and reproduces dependency of the periphery on the core. Even if the tourism sector is growing, it often has too many leakages especially if the ties with the developed countries are maintained (Boz, 2011:200).

While tourism has grown and is growing, it has led to displacement of local people because many governments, donors and financial institutions in the Global South are prioritising it to spur economic growth (Neef, 2019:XIII). At the same time, neoliberal forces has seen inclusion of disadvantaged people in tourism accompanied by widening inequalities and the loss of their cultures which is influenced by Western ideology (Saayman & Giampiccoli, 2016:162). For instance, tourism development in Seychelles together with the IMF-driven liberalization has created dependency on foreign owned firms (Lee, Hampton & Jeyacheya, 2015:212). The case of Seychelles also show how local people get menial jobs compared to high paying jobs given to expatriates (Lee et al., 2015:217). In the Caribbean there was a drive towards diversification from sugar plantations to tourism because of low investment costs involved and the inviting climate, however, the sector became exploitative as was in the sugar industry (Mooney Walton et al., 2018:4). In Tanzania, foreign ownership, and poor pay for workers in the sector are problems that are negatively affecting efforts to reduce poverty and inequality (Kinyondo & Pelizzo, 2015:76).



In Lesotho tourism development in a neoliberal context, shows large-scale infrastructure development creating and widening inequalities through the re-organization of space which benefits external elite interests over local ownership (Braun & McLees, 2012:436). Neoliberalism seems unavoidable leading to a feeling that “capital is all powerful; national policy must pay obeisance or pay the cost” (Natrass, 1996: 34) with the “apparent ending of all political alternatives to liberal democracy” (Peet, 2002: 63). It may be the case that local elites participate in the underdevelopment of their states because of the imperatives of privatisation and deregulation which limits their options (Bianchi, 2002:289). Whatever the reason, there seems to be a hegemonic discourse based on neoliberalism that controls economic developments globally (see Gosovic, 2000; Peet, 2002).

Iraqi Kurdistan is experiencing the global hegemonic neoliberal context as neoliberalism is debated and discussed in Kurdistan. Kuruuzum (2018:191) observes that neoliberalism and independence came together in Iraqi Kurdistan by stating that in “Iraqi Kurdistan, the national time for their long-awaited independence seemed to coincide with the global capitalist time that transformed the marginalised region into a new frontier for neoliberal development.” However, after positive growth, the area went through a period of depression which manifested in economic downturn due to civil unrest following the budget disputes with Baghdad, the emergence of Islamist militancy and a drop in oil prices. Erbil’s clock tower was also silenced. The city’s skyline shows signs of affluence and followed by sudden decline (Kuruuzum, 2018:191). The crisis also influenced doubting the dream of establishing an independent Kurdish state as the KRG’s multi-year economic boom reclined into bust (Kuruuzum, 2018:186). The cost of living has gone up leaving people to sell their labour in exchange for commodities they cannot afford denting their standard of living (Ahmed, 2018:73).

The Kurdistan liberation movement in Iraq, has always been much less leftist for gender equality than the Kurdish liberation movements in Turkey and Syria and to some degree in Iran (Ahmed, 2018). Therefore, as suggested by Ahmed (2018) the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Iraq Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) are both oriented to neoliberalism and in Iraqi Kurdistan a new capitalist elite has been emerged. For example, the KDP constitution supports domestic and foreign investment in agriculture, tourism and industry (Ahmed, 2018:71). In this regard, Altaee, Tofiq & Jamel (2017:104) observe that besides the numerous resources found in the Kurdistan region, it also has opened numerous investment opportunities and improved low wages as well as providing investors with suitable lands for their projects, tax exemptions including banking facilities and other attractive facilities.

However, a research in the agricultural sector proposes that promoting small-scale family farms should be pursued for the benefit of the region (Jongerden et al., 2019:9). The same can be said in the tourism sector, where CBT small companies could form the backbone of the tourism sector. However, in the case of tourism, larger companies should also be incentivized to adopt CBT principles – and work with the smaller CBT companies. Local Kurds also acknowledge that they cannot be independent if policies benefit foreign companies at the expense of local Kurds (Kuruuzum, 2018:197). Benefits not accruing to local communities were noted in a Kurdish Village in Iran when a local village resident mentions that “Tourists come here every day. We see almost more than 500 tourists coming every day, but few of them stay in this hotel and other accommodations in the village, most of them are same-day visitors that will stay in city hotels. We have very minimum of benefits, a major portion of this benefit will go to travel agents and other service providers” (in Ghaderi & Henderson, 2012:51).

Advancing CBT can be considered to be proper to enhance local control without denying foreign presence via specific legislation. Alternatives need to be sought. At the end, Ahmed (2018:73) observes that there are still socio-economic injustices within Kurdish society as exploitation of Kurds is rife in the Middle East, and there is poor environmental awareness in the area as seen from the quality of air, water and garbage in once ‘scenic’ places.



Alternative tourism has also been influenced by neoliberalism. Thus alternative tourism have been compromised by a threatened tourism industry weakening them to exploit their full potential (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008:347). The original conceptualisation of alternative tourism has been forgotten and usurped (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008). Alternative tourism approaches such as ecotourism, pro-poor tourism (PPT) and responsible tourism (RT) remain within the neoliberal framework (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2014; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008, 2018; Neth, Rith & Knerr, 2008; Fletcher & Neves, 2012) and nature based tourism has been dubbed a 'key driver of neoliberalism' (Duffy, 2015, p. 2).

Instead, globalisation should be questioned, because it is not the level of globalisation a country that will make the tourism sector increases the economic welfare of the local people (Ivanov & Webster, 2013a:631; see also Ivanov & Webster, 2013b on similar issues). The rethinking of the global context and new solutions need to be excogitated and implemented. For example at global level, it was noted that development couldn't take place without addressing the structure of North-South economic relations with respect to trade, investment, and technology transfer (de Kadt, 1979:38). At more national level, in Tanzania (Kinyondo & Pelizzo, 2015:76) indicates, that policies have to change for local people to benefit from tourism. From an alternative tourism perspective, change also needs to take place, which means while numbers of tourists and profits increase, the sector must serve the interests and development aspirations of the local communities (Guo, Jiang & Li, 2019:9). It must also be noted that not all countries can manage large-scale developments but should provide incentives for small businesses and promulgate legislation that enhance job creation to benefit local communities (Andriotis, 2002:76). Collaboration is not excluded but "self-reliance does not imply isolationism, either politically or economically. It means that we shall depend on ourselves, not on others. But this is not the same thing as saying we shall not trade with other people or co-operate with them when it is to mutual benefit" (Nyerere, 1974: 99).

Therefore, sustainability and inclusivity in tourism seems necessary as recognized by, for example the 2012 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in Doha by emphasizing sustainability of the sector for the benefit of economies (UNWTO, 2018B:12; see also Garza-Rodriguez, 2019:2; on the need on more inclusive development see also World Economic Forum - WEF, 2018b: 1). Economic growth cannot be sustained if it is not inclusive (Hongbo, 2013:7). The issue is that local people should benefit from tourism through job creation and investments (Mogale & Odeku, 2018:10) as economic growth is not sufficient to reduce poverty and inequality unless it is sustainable and inclusive (Niemhom, 2018:9). The same World Tourism Organization UNWTO, 2018b:16) very recently wrote that tourism has the potential to develop local economies through inclusion, the creation of new products and services and by taking advantage of the growing markets (UNWTO, 2018b:16).

Similarly to the hegemonic discourse, while inclusive growth is proposed, it remains controversial and conceptually vague while being nested in orthodox growth/neoclassical modes of analysis (Hampton, Jeyacheya & Long, 2018:371). As such inclusive business supports neoliberals which confines the debate to economic issues without looking at the political economy which places structural inequalities at the center of the barriers that encumber development for the poor (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018:592). In fact, the concept of 'inclusive' indicates transformation, participation, and benefits in relation to disadvantaged groups of society. Inclusive tourism is "Transformative tourism in which marginalized groups are engaged in ethical production or consumption of tourism and the sharing of its benefits" (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018:592).

A success factor for CBT are characteristics such as inclusive participation, equity in planning, management, decision-making, ownership, and distribution of benefits and costs (Tasci, Semrad, Yilmaz, 2013:22) as participation is linked to personal benefits accruing to local communities (Harun et al, 2018:2).



Community-based tourism

Community-based tourism is also an alternative form of tourism that has suffered from the neoliberal milieu by losing its meaning and aim. CBT differs from general *community development* theory because its intention is not transformation as found in community development and it does not emphasise community empowerment (Beeton, 2006:50). Pleumarom, (2002) observes that current CBT is practised differently from its initial propositions, especially with regards to issues of ownership which have changed to degrade local people from owners to stakeholders of the periphery. Terminology and projects related to CBT have been moulded and shaped by the globalisation process. For example, in some cases in the practice of CBT, communities have lost control to external partners as they no longer own those businesses. CBT alternatives have their own problems but were owned and controlled by local people without interference of government, business and international agencies (Pleumarom, 2002). Ownership and control are key tenets in the practice of CBT.

The above issues are fundamental because of the importance regarding who controls the business and where do the benefits go (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008:115). However, CBT and Justice Tourism have been proposed as a valid alternatives to conventional neoliberal tourism (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2014; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008). In this context CBT must be remain within its original and alternative understandings.

Community-based tourism is related to the alternative development approaches of the 1970s for disadvantaged community members for their empowerment, for sustainability, self-reliance and social justice (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2019:4). Other fundamental issues in CBT include local control/ownership of CBT and its redistributive approach. Community-based tourism “highlights the importance of community empowerment and `ownership` in tourism development as a means to sustain the community growth” (Abdul Razzaq et al., 2012:10). Definitions CBT emphasise that CBT should be owned, controlled, managed and organised by the local community (Leksakundilok & Hirsch, 2008:214; Kayat, 2014:1; Johnson, 2010:151; Kaur, Jawaid & Othman, 2016:17; Terencia, 2018:26; Nataraja & Devidasan, 2014:68; Tasci Semrad & Yilmaz, 2013:84; Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018:760; Höckert, 2009:20; Tamir, 2015: 70). Community ownership, self-regulation and community-based management are intended to ensure that local people are empowered and receive a fair share of the benefits of tourism (Sripun, Yongvanit & Pratt, 2017:104). Local control is important for the long-term functionality of CBT projects (Tamir, 2015:70). Thus, CBT should be removed from the neo-colonial framework that favours foreign control and ownership of tourism but giving little benefits to local people (Ullan de La Rosa et al., 2017: 469). Control is fundamental because even if communities receive some benefits from tourism, without direct control or ownership, the benefits are meaningless if they perform menial jobs without realising maximum benefits such as control and profits (Yanes, et al., 2019:2). Thus, CBT venture should always remain fully owned and controlled by community members and external entities should only have a facilitative role in specific issues such as marketing (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018:761). The redistributive intent of CBT is also vital because CBT is associated with distributive matters and social justice, equity, ethical relationships and being located in the locale/community (Dangi & Jamal, 2008:12; see also Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018:22; Ullan de La Rosa et al., 2017:469). One of the key principles of CBT is “Equity in distribution of income and wealth, avoiding losers and winners (winners usually outsiders, exploiters)” (Tasci et al., 2013:12). Direct and indirect beneficiaries are therefore also part of CBT (see Sproule & Suhandi, 1998:216; see also Ndlovu & Rogerson, 2004:446; Singh, 2008:156; Suansri, 2003:69). However, CBT remains circumscribed and influenced by two main factors, first, the global context and second, the fact that local disadvantaged people who are the protagonists of CBT often lack various resources to proceed alone in CBT development. The control and appropriation of the territory becomes fundamental.



Community-based tourism makes it possible for territorial appropriation, conservation of natural and cultural assets (Guijarro, Pacheco & Verdesoto, 2018:13) and increased control over their lands enhances their esteem (Tolkach, King & Pearlman, 2013:331). Control of land, of culture and relation to social justice and self-determination are all related to CBT. The idea of social justice “finds resonance with self-sufficiency and self-determination which are constitutive of a corpus of societal ideals to which they all belong. It supports the spreading of these ideals in a context of equality, cooperation and solidarity between people and between hosts and visitors where no one is superior over the other” (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2019:10). For example, it is noted that indigenous ecotourism is framed as a strategy “to retain and gain land, intellectual and cultural property rights; to access, manage and use traditional lands and resources; and in general, to promote self-determination and sovereignty for indigenous communities and nations” (Walter, 2010:504; similarly see also Colton, 2005:186). Community-based tourism should follow these lines. Thus, linking indigenous people and CBT allows them to have control and command over their traditional territories (Hinch, 2004:253). Community-based tourism can contribute to achieving social justice among various social groups by raising “awareness and enhance their control of the territory where they operate by enhancing the control of locals in the local tourism sector” (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2019:8).

Community-based tourism can be useful to all disadvantaged/marginalize people/group of people looking for social justice, self-determination, equity and so on, being therefore attractive for minority groups, specific workers groups or aspiring nations when they are also associable to desire of social justice, cooperation and solidarity. “Support for this [self-determination] principle is inherent within the concept of community-based tourism” (Hinch, 2004:253). In this context, unity and solidarity in CBT “could be an instrument that could enhance the visibility and value of a social justice cause within peoples” by promoting local control, within a redistributive framework, and appreciation of cultural differences (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2019:8).

A proposal for Kurdistan

The past and recent (and still current) history of Kurdistan, which is plagued by wars and conflicts characteristic of current Middle East, has often jeopardized its tourism potential. It is anticipated that when the safety and security situation improves, tourism can grow. The case of the Kurdistan region within northern Iraq is the subject of this paper. In the case of Kurdistan region in Iraq (KRI) “The Kurdistan region has always been known from its safety and security because of its relative political stability and the regions separation from the rest of Iraq” (Altaee, Tofiq & Jamel, 2017:106). This article draws from literature on Kurdistan region in Iraq may be use to represent the Kurdistan region as a whole. The article favours solutions that enhance greater independence and autonomy of the Kurdistan region in a peace and cooperation perspective amongst all its people. In peaceful territories, tourism has a lot of potential, as expressed for Iraqi Kurdistan as it is for all Kurdistan regions “Tourism has potential, if visitors can travel freely and securely” (Soderberg, 2015:XIII).

With the retreat of ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] forces in 2017, tourism has surged, principally in the more stable Kurdistan Region of Iraq region, with international tourist figures reaching 1.3 million within the first half of 2018 (ECPAT International, 2019:4) and tourism is considered an important tool for the development of rural communities in the Kurdistan Regional Government (Harun, 2018:9). Tourism is emerging as a possible important revenue stream for Kurdistan and the Government has recognized this potential, thus the tourism sector is “considered to be the best sector which has been identified as the most potential offering sector’ (Prabhu, Abdullah & Madan Mohan, 2019:1).

The tourists themselves seem to appreciate their visits to Kurdistan as they are immensely satisfied by the warmth and the hospitality of local people; the courteousness of employees, and the abundance of historical sites which make Kurdistan a desired tourist destination



(Prabhu et al., 2019:8). Thus, in the Kurdistan region of Iraq (KRI) the Kurdish government intend “to promote tourism, in its four provinces, in order to sustain local economies, and to enhance employment and growth” and make it an attractive destination by developing specific tourism strategies and policies (Altaee, Tofiq & Jamel, 2017:104). To that end, the Kurdistan government of KRI has built two international airports, Erbil and Sulamaniya, which run direct flights to and from Kurdistan (Altaee et al., 2017:104). Tourism is seen as a priority sector in Iraqi Kurdistan Region such that in the region received 1.8 million tourists in 2016 which increased to 2.25 million in 2017; with a forecast of 2.5 million for 2018 (Prisma Report, no date: 14). A lot of effort is being directed towards tourism development through foreign investment and running huge public relations campaigns that promote “Kurdistan: The Other Iraq” (Khalil, 2009:3). The Kurdistan of region of Iraq intends to turn itself into the world’s next tourism hotspot for both international investors and visitors (Prisma Report, no date:14).

In this context, KRI seems to follow the ‘business as usual’ approach in tourism by favouring foreign investment and attractive incentives focusing on international conventional tourism. As such besides its attractiveness due to its security and stability, KRI also offers land for projects, banking facilities, tax exemptions and other incentives (Altaee et al., 2017:104). The investment law is promoted as “the friendliest in the region” (Khalil, 2009:3). The sector is growing with Hilton due to open a hotel shortly (Prisma Report, no date: 3). To overcome hurdles and challenges in registering new businesses in region “the KRG [Kurdish Regional Government (in Iraq)] intends to remove any bureaucratic hurdles that hinder investment (Rasaiah, 2016:2). The tourism image reflects the conventional international context as in 2014 Erbil the capital of KRG was named Arab Tourism Capital because it has “a lot to offer visitors: history, shopping, 5-star hotels, restaurants, mountains and much more,” says Mawlood, adding: “We are currently promoting better links with private tourism companies” (Prisma Report, no date, 7). The Minister of Municipalities and Tourism stated that roads have been allocated more funding for reconstruction and investment laws are to be amended to benefit foreign investors with specific measures for tourism (Amin in Prisma Report, no date:14).

Conferences and workshops were planned to showcase the region. At one of these, held in Erbil in 2016 and attended by 500 companies from 27 countries” the government offered them and the wider international investment community the chance to “seize the opportunity of investing in the Kurdistan Region” (Amin in Prisma Report, no date:14). Local and international investors have same rules and, fundamentally, can acquire assets, as the Chairman, Board of Investment said local and foreign investors are treated the same and all are entitled to 100% ownership of land and projects (Abdulrahman, in Prisma Report, no date, 7). Furthermore, it is evident that there is a bias on investments that do not favour basic infrastructures upon which tourism should be built – and it is here argued the whole population can benefit if such investments are pursued. Compared to the investment in infrastructures vital for tourism development, too much emphasis has been devoted (especially in Erbil) on new hotels and restaurants with not link to actual sizes of the local population or the number of visitors (Rasaiah, 2016:2).

The risk to build a tourism industry without having developed the proper infrastructure upon which tourism itself depends and, possibly most importantly, the risk to lose ownership and control of land and tourism assets to foreign entities and local elites seems possible in this region. The risk is losing the control of the tourism sector and tourism assets (such as land) at the detriment of local, especially if disadvantaged, local people. By focusing on the ‘business as usual’ foreign investment in tourism in Kurdistan, the risk to follow the path of other region/countries of becoming dependent – with possibly high level of economic leakages – from other countries and companies. Instead, this article proposes an approach to tourism development based on CBT principles and characteristics that will decrease the risk of dependency and loss of resources to foreign entities. With the new proposal, while tourism development could advance at a slower pace, it will remain under local control and working



within an equity/redistribution milieu – and decreasing the level of possible economic leakages – and allowing the local people and their history, culture and thoughts to endure. The issue is not to eliminate or avoid foreign or local private investments – these remain important and not feasible in the short term– but it is important to link investments (both foreign and local) to specific CBT principles and characteristics so to make tourism work for community development (emphasizing disadvantaged sections of the community), equity and the maintenance of local control and ownership of tourism resources and assets.

This different strategy is based on CBT and local control approaches and can be valuable also because the KRG “may worry about the effect that lack of international support would have on would-be investors and the enthusiasm of tourists to visit an independent Kurdistan” (Nader, Scotten, Allen & Hanauer, 2016:125). Kurds are often left alone as such Kurds often say they have “no friends but the mountains”, alluding to a long history of betrayal (Cornish & Pitel, 2019, online, see also Glavin, 2015). But mountains mean freedom, justice and cooperation/solidarity. As proposed in a renowned Occitan proverb ‘*Les mountanhos partéjoun les àigos e jònton li ome*’ (Mountains divide waters and unite people). Mountains are not a barrier “but have been a conjunction ring, amongst different people and environments that have maintained, at high cost, their independence [...] mountains are a hinge amongst people, but they do not divide one ethnic group from another, if anything they unite them” (Schena & Ravera, 2009:5). There is a need, therefore, to propose a tourism development approach that emphasizes and enhances independence within maintaining local control of tourism and tourism assets by favoring a redistributive and equity context. A study on tourism in KRI found out that it is necessary to have employees with high qualifications in the sector are needed implying that public and private sectors should promote training and education institutions that produce skilled people to service the sector (Altaee, Tofiq & Jamel, 2017:106). Certainly this is also a crucial aspect for CBT where the need for qualify personnel is high – at all levels and in all sectors. Local people, such as students should be at the forefront. CBT is about transmitting own culture, history and heritage to the visitors from a local people/indigenous perspective. Clarry (2017:150) clarifies that with more students, there is a need for more qualified people such as professional guides.

Various trajectories and level of embeddedness of tourism development that are associated with CBT are possible. Four possible strategies to enhance CBT in Kurdistan are proposed:

1. Transformation/adaptation of existing or new conventional (or alternative) tourism businesses based on CBT principles, characteristics (indexes/classification)
2. Linking of existing and new conventional (or alternative) tourism businesses with CBT businesses.
3. Increasing the size of CBT businesses (for example bigger resorts, hotels, tour operators).
4. Advancing CBT network (CBT-N)

In addition, tourism development should aim to mainstream CBT (using the four above proposed strategies) in specific localities and regions with the ambition to mainstream CBT at country level). The establishment of specific CBT areas/zones could be the first step at the initial stages and later expand to the whole region or country. Point one above relates to tourism investment. Therefore, this article is not against tourism investment, but it proposes managing tourism investment towards CBT in order to increase the transformation of conventional tourism towards CBT principles and characteristics. Thus, tourism investment is possible but within a CBT framework. For example, to attract hotels and other tourism companies to transform themselves embedding CBT principles and characteristics incentives could be used (although legal requirement should also be applied). In this case the recently proposes Investment Redistributive Incentive Model (IRIM) (see Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2020)



could be used to propose incentives to tourism companies willing to transform/adapt themselves based on CBT principle.

Tourism investment incentives will be linked and be proportional to the level of adherence of a tourism company to CBT principles and characteristics. Specific CBT indexes and classifications (see for example CBT classification system in Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2017 and community-based tourism affinity index in Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2016) will form the guidelines upon which to establish the level of adherence – and therefore type and level of incentives – of tourism companies. Incentives can take various form, such as tax incentives, smoothing bureaucracy or giving a company priority or special links to skilled personnel. At the same time, it is important to foster and support the growth of CBT itself. This can be done by linking tourism companies to CBT ventures and/or assisting CBT ventures themselves to grow. Specific incentives and facilitation to CBT companies (that practically are 100% adhering to CBT principles and characteristics) can also be promoted. Community-based tourism should also not be confined, as often is, to rural areas but should also be practised in urban areas.

Another impart aspects is to facilitate and advance CBT-N. Community-based tourism networks are vital in CBT. For example, they are important to “deliver and sustain the CBT venture over the longer-term, communities can develop partnerships and networks with relevant organisations to extend outreach, build resilience and create a supportive environment” (Asker, et al., 2010:77). Into this case, a Kurdistan CBT-N should be established and developed. This network could be also be developed in each country where Kurdistan is divided and to develop a single CBT-N that puts together the whole of Kurdistan as a single entity.

It is with controlling tourism, that is, by embracing a tourism development model based on CBT principles and characteristics that Kurdistan people can retain and possibly enhance the control over the local tourism sector, their land and resources. This does not mean to favor isolationism but, recalling again Nyerere (1974: 99) words “self-reliance does not imply isolationism, either politically or economically. It means that we shall depend on ourselves, not on others. But this is not the same thing as saying we shall not trade with other people or cooperate with them when it is to mutual benefit.” In addition, a CBT approach will also allow the local people to tell their own story, to narrate their history and culture from their perspective instead of it being interpreted and reinterpreted by non-locals with the obvious risk of becoming, at various degrees and forms, not a true perspective of them but of fake news.

Conclusion

Tourism is a major sector around the world touching almost all world localities and valorising their natural, cultural, and social assets and peoples around the world. Hence, tourism could well be used as a strategy to gain/regain control of local assets, enhance social justice, self-determination, self-recognition and self-development. This article used the example of Kurdistan, however, the strategies towards a CBT modelled tourism sector favoring local control of tourism, should be valid, as much as with each context specific possible adjustment, for any localities, region and country around the world from Greenland to Vladivostok, from Iraq Kurdistan to Kalahari desert area, from Alpine valleys to big or small islands such as Maldives or cities such as Buenos Aires.

What is important is to keep into consideration each place's specific socio-economic, cultural and environmental circumstances. Context is important. Tourism should be locally controlled, specifically emphasizing redistributive measure at the benefit of disadvantaged sections of society. Wherever tourism happens it has local impacts on people (and who are arguably the poorest that often suffer its negative impacts – see for example inflation linked to tourism), environment, culture and on.



The current value and role of tourism in society is huge globally and this should serve the purpose of promoting more equality and redistribution of resources not, as currently happens, for producing inequality, dispossession of resources and exploitation. Shifting the tourism sector towards CBT tourism that is locally controlled and works for redistribution is thus imperative. Taking Paulo Freire's dedication to the Pedagogy of the Oppressed it can be said that CBT associates itself with "...the oppressed, and to those who suffer with them and fight at their side" (Freire, 2000:5).

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