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# Pro-poor Tourism: a critique

DAVID HARRISON

**ABSTRACT** *Tourism's role as a development tool has increased over the past three decades. Its contribution to poverty alleviation was first noted in the 1970s, but this focus was increasingly blurred in theoretical debates over 'development' in the 1980s and 1990s. It resurfaced at the end of the 1990s with the emergence of 'pro-poor tourism' (PPT), defined as tourism which brings net benefits to the poor. In this paper the emergence of PPT is described, its main features outlined, and several conceptual and substantive criticisms are discussed. It is concluded that, while PPT is based on a worthwhile injunction to help the poor, it is distinctive neither theoretically nor in its methods, and has become too closely associated with community-based tourism. Rather than remain on the academic and development margins, it should be reintegrated into and reinform mainstream studies of tourism and development, and focus more on researching the actual and potential role of mass tourism in alleviating poverty and bringing 'development'.*

## Pro-poor tourism in context

After the Second World War economic growth and 'development' were considered vital for the Third World, and debates over the most appropriate theoretical frameworks, ideologies and policies continued for three decades. In the 1970s, for instance, the satisfaction of 'basic needs' was linked to the recognition that economic growth alone did not solve the problems of the poor,<sup>1</sup> and Seers argued strongly that development was best achieved by alleviating poverty, reducing unemployment and inequality and, later, by increasing cultural independence and self-reliance.<sup>2</sup>

Such ideas were incorporated into the programmes of many international organisations, including the International Labour Organisation and the World Bank, both of which advocated 'bottom-up' approaches to development,<sup>3</sup> while both the 1980 Independent Commission on International Development Issues (the Brandt Report) and the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Report) considered poverty alleviation a major development objective.<sup>4</sup>

It was soon recognised that international tourism, which had increased rapidly between 1950 and 1970, as indicated in Table 1, could play a key role in poverty alleviation. The World Bank led the way in the 1970s, financing

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TABLE 1. International tourist arrivals and receipts, selected years, and percentage share by region

Year	Total arrivals (million)	change over the period	Africa	Americas	Asia/Pacific	Europe	Middle East
			Percentage share of international tourist arrivals				
1950	25		2	30	0.1	66	–
1960	69	176%	1.5	24	0.3	72	–
1970	160	132%	1.8	23	0.6	70	–
1980	285	78%	2.5	19	7.8	69	2
1990	439	54%	3.5	21.1	12.8	60.5	2.2
1995	540	23%	3.8	20.2	15.3	58.3	2.5
2000	687	27%	4.1	18.6	16.1	57.6	3.5
2001	680	–1%	4.3	18.0	17.8	56.4	3.7
2002	700	3%	4.2	16.7	18.7	56.3	4.2
2003	694	–0.1%	4.5	16.2	16.3	58.7	4.3
2004	765	10%	4.4	16.5	18.9	55.5	4.8
2005	807	5%	4.6	16.6	19.2	54.8	4.9
2005	Total receipts (US\$billion)		Percentage share of international tourism receipts				
	680		3.1	21.3	20.4	51.2	4.1
	Average receipt per arrival (US\$)		Regional average receipt per arrival				
	840		590	1080	890	790	710

Source: World Tourism Organization (WTO), *Current Travel and Tourism Indicators*, Madrid: WTO, 1991, p 11; WTO, *Tourism Highlights*, Madrid: WTO, 2006, p 2; and United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), *Compendium of Tourism Statistics, Data 2001–2005*, Madrid: UNWTO, 2007, pp 2–3.

infrastructural projects and providing credit for foreign investment, only later moderating its involvement through concerns about tourism's social and environmental impacts.<sup>5</sup> And Agenda 21, formulated by the Earth Council in 1996 and adopted by the United Nations in 1999, also led to an increased focus on tourism, especially as a means of involving community members as participants in local development projects.

The adoption in 2000 of the Millennium Development Goals, the first of which is the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, further reinforced the programmes of numerous multilateral and bilateral institutions in promoting tourism as a way of alleviating poverty. Among the former are regional development banks, including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which devotes considerable funds to tourism development, especially in the Greater Mekong region,<sup>6</sup> and such UN agencies as the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), while the latter include many national aid agencies.

In addition, despite the closure of its Tourism Projects Department in 1979, the World Bank continues to have a crucial role in advising on (some would say imposing) structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), now *Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers* (PRSPs), in developing countries and, with the International Monetary Fund, in promoting tourism as one feature of private sector development, an approach which is largely *laissez-faire*.<sup>7</sup>

*Academic inputs*

When de Kadt's path-breaking collection of papers was published, with financial assistance from the World Bank, he was a colleague of Seers at the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, where basic needs approaches were much discussed. His 1979 summary, as valid now as three decades ago, lays out the pros and cons of tourism as a development tool.<sup>8</sup> Recognising tourism's contribution to employment, economic growth, entrepreneurship and inter-sectoral linkages, he also noted it could exacerbate inequalities at international and local levels. And, anticipating later debates, he queried how far mass tourism would really contribute to poverty alleviation:

More than ever before, the development community is searching for means that will enable the poor to provide for their basic needs through more productive work, more widely available social services, and increased participation in political decision making. It needs to be considered whether the deliberate and large-scale development of tourism, conceived as a major net earner of foreign exchange, leads to results consistent with this newly identified goal of development.<sup>9</sup>

Contributors to his volume were divided over how far the poor benefited from tourism, as were several of those involved in an equally important collection of papers on the anthropology of tourism.<sup>10</sup> In fact, many academics continue to doubt tourism's role as a development tool,<sup>11</sup> with their views often coloured by their commitment to a range of theoretical (and fashionably changing) perspectives, including modernisation and dependency theory, liberalism, statism and globalisation. A linked tendency, also apparent since the early 1980s, has been to emphasise the contribution to sustainable development of 'alternative', small-scale, community-based or ecotourist ventures, characterised by high levels of local participation, which reportedly epitomise genuinely 'sustainable' tourism development.<sup>12</sup>

While such approaches have undoubtedly broadened the debate, they have also tended to deflect attention away from the more specific question of how far tourism *does* alleviate poverty. Indeed, empirical evidence on this topic is rare and, where assessments have been made, conclusions are contradictory.<sup>13</sup> It is in this context, at the end of the 1990s, that the movement for 'pro-poor tourism' (PPT) emerged.

*The emergence of pro-poor tourism*

Since the end of the 1990s a loose alliance of several individuals, largely outside the academic mainstream of tourism studies, has successfully refocused attention in some quarters on the need to consider tourism as a means of alleviating poverty. There are several accounts of how this association emerged but the outlines are clear.<sup>14</sup> In 1998 the UK Department for International Development (DFID) commissioned DeLoitte and Touche, along with Dilys Roe of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and Caroline Ashley of the Overseas Development

Institute (ODI), to report on the extent to which outbound tourism from the UK could contribute to poverty alleviation in destination societies. The ensuing report suggested that, while tourism already helped poor countries, more could be done with a specific focus on the poor; the criteria for the success of pro-poor tourism were clearly specified:

Pro-poor tourism strategies are concerned specifically with impacts on poor people, though the non-poor may also benefit. Strategies focus less on expanding the overall size of tourism, and more on unlocking opportunities for specific groups within it (on tilting the cake, not expanding it). However, these strategies have to be integrated within general tourism development for two reasons: mainstream activities (such as tourism planning) need to be influenced by pro-poor perspectives; and pro-poor tourism cannot succeed without successful development of the whole tourism destination.<sup>15</sup>

After the 1999 Report Roe and Ashley were joined by Harold Goodwin, of the International Centre for Responsible Tourism, and the Pro-poor Tourism Partnership (PPTP) was formed. In the ensuing years they and associates in their respective institutions, along with collaborators elsewhere, produced a range of case studies, often funded by DFID, designed to show how (largely small-scale) tourism could alleviate poverty by stimulating local involvement, partnerships and procurement in numerous destinations, including Southern Africa, Uganda, The Gambia, Nepal, the Caribbean and the Czech Republic. In particular, the case studies focused on partnerships of the private sector, communities and community-based tourism enterprises, including NGOs, and showed how companies, including package tour operators in The Gambia, and local communities might benefit when the latter were brought into direct trading relationships with the former. These were followed by other Working Papers that reviewed methods followed in PPT studies and a range of other topics relevant to PPT, including coping mechanisms of Kenyans when tourism was in decline, international statistics, literature reviews, international codes of conduct and standards, and local sourcing and enterprise development in the Caribbean.<sup>16</sup>

PPTP personnel also made important contributions to other initiatives, including the high-profile Sustainable Tourism–End Poverty (ST-EP) campaign of the then World Tourism Organization (the UN appellation was added later).<sup>17</sup> Launched at the World Summit for Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, in 2002, the campaign has three dimensions: first, the incorporation of a poverty component in the UNWTO's technical assistance programme; second, the ST-EP Foundation, which finances research and co-operation with other organisations to promote poverty alleviation through tourism; and, third, the ST-EP Trust Fund, which finances technical assistance projects specifically geared to poverty alleviation.<sup>18</sup>

In line with the focus on poverty, UNWTO followed up the 2002 publication with a series of recommendations on how major stakeholders in tourism could work together to ensure that tourism development was increasingly focused on benefits for the poor.<sup>19</sup>

Publications (with very similar recommendations) arising from a conference organised by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in 2003 also reveal PPT influence. The initial background paper, a resumé of key issues in sustainable tourism with a ‘pro-poor’ gloss, and practical questions for workshop participants,<sup>20</sup> was supported by country case studies purportedly showing how (mainly small-scale) tourism alleviated poverty.<sup>21</sup> More formal collaboration is evident in another summary of key ideas and discussion of possible initiatives and indicators for poverty alleviation through tourism.<sup>22</sup>

Clearly, the focus on tourism as an alleviator of poverty is not new. It was implicit in the early emphasis on tourism as a stimulator of jobs and economic growth, in the work of the World Bank and other agencies, including in the development of strategies and policies centred around the concept of basic needs, and has never been entirely absent from the academic literature on tourism and development. Nevertheless, specifically PPT approaches, promoted in the UK by a small group of researchers and consultants since the end of the 1990s, to some extent by others elsewhere,<sup>23</sup> and implemented by numerous aid agencies,<sup>24</sup> seem to have led to a popular, simple, sharper and more appealing moral focus on the links poorer residents in destinations have with tourism enterprises.

### Key features of pro-poor tourism

Using numerous publications of PPT practitioners as a basis,<sup>25</sup> and the various Working Papers produced by the Pro-Poor Tourism Partnership,<sup>26</sup> the characteristics of PPT can be summarised fairly succinctly, as indicated in Table 2.

First, and perhaps most importantly, proponents of PPT are not anti-capitalist. Rather, strategies derived from a PPT perspective are formulated to incorporate the poor into capitalist markets by increasing the employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, and more collective benefits, available to them. In this respect PPT resembles ‘fair trade’, in that it is a form of market intervention. Whereas the latter attempts to build in ‘added value’ to the product on sale, thus creating a qualitatively ‘better’ product,<sup>27</sup> the former attempts to change market conditions and influence the demand for labour, services and goods provided by the poor.

Second—and crucially—PPT relies on *and must be integrated into*, wider tourism systems. It is *not* a stand-alone option. As Ashley *et al* indicate, when reviewing the results of case studies of PPT financed by the UK’s DFID, successful PPT depends on the poor having access to markets, on the commercial viability of PPT projects, on a policy framework that provides a secure investment climate (including access to land), and on effective stakeholder co-operation and strategy implementation, categorised as ‘implementation issues’.<sup>28</sup>

Third, PPT is not a specific theory or model, and is not tied to any theories or models. It is not reliant on any such perspective as modernisation or underdevelopment, statism or neoliberalism. Rather, it is an orientation, an

TABLE 2. The characteristics of pro-poor tourism

PPT is not	PPT does
anti-capitalist.	focus on incorporating the poor into capitalist markets by increasing job and entrepreneurial opportunities and collective benefits. Like fair trade, it is a form of market intervention, which relies heavily on the private sector
separate from wider tourism systems	depend on existing tourism structures and markets
a theory or model	orientate research to the net benefits from tourism that can or could accrue to the poor
a niche type of tourism, eg CBT	apply to <i>any</i> kind or type of tourism, including large- and small-scale tourism, <i>even if the non-poor also benefit</i> . Can be from regional or national policies or private sector involvement
a specific method	use numerous methods, none of which are specific to PPT, including value chain analysis, to collect data and show how the poor are and can be further involved in tourism
only about 'the poor'	recognise that the non-poor may also benefit from tourism, <i>even</i> disproportionately. It is less concerned with the relative than the absolute (net) benefits received by the poor
just about hunger and no/ inadequate incomes	have a broad definition of 'poverty', including lack of freedom, opportunity, power, skills and education. It is about 'development'
only about individual benefits	focus on community benefits—eg water, sanitation, health, education, infrastructure, etc.
only for those occupying the 'moral high ground'	require wide stakeholder co-operation and commitment, including national and local authorities, planners, the private sector, etc, ideally combining to ensure the poor benefit from tourism

approach to any form of tourism which focuses on the net benefits accruing to poor people in tourist destination areas.

Fourth, and as a consequence, the issue is not so much the kind of tourism involved, but the extent to which the poor do or could receive net benefits from it. PPT is not a niche type of tourism, like, for example, community-based tourism (CBT) (where, in any case, the benefits from tourism accruing to the poor may be secondary to conservation or other priorities). And there is no reason why PPT need be associated only (or even at all) with small-scale tourism. Mass tourism, even in its most extreme forms, can potentially be considered a form of PPT.

Fifth, no methods of data collection, targeting or analysis are appropriate only to PPT. As Goodwin notes, statistics of tourist arrivals and expenditure, and tourism satellite accounts, tell little, in themselves, about tourism's impacts at destination level, and he advocates measuring remittances from tourist areas and household income from tourism enterprises, and assessing the results of improved market access.<sup>29</sup> Such methods are clearly relevant to PPT, but they, too, are no more specific to it than examining leakages from destination areas, comparing the relationship of tourism to pre-existing or new small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs), detailing the new employment opportunities tourism creates, assessing the impacts of capacity building and improvements in welfare, or outlining more general changes, for good or ill,

in culture and values.<sup>30</sup> All these approaches have long existed in mainstream tourism.

Similarly, while value chains (known *inter alia* as global commodity chains, value systems, production networks and value networks<sup>31</sup>) have sometimes been analysed by proponents of PPT, value chain analysis (VCA) is well established in examinations of differential market relationships of developing country firms in other economic sectors.<sup>32</sup> When specifically used in collecting and categorising tourism-related economic activities, probably because of funding and time constraints, VCA has been applied somewhat simplistically. In particular, attention has focused primarily on linkages *within* tourism destinations, rather than on the wider global context.<sup>33</sup> This is not to deny its usefulness as a framework for organising data collection, but VCA is not a specific feature of PPT, as indicated by papers on VCA and tourism that make no reference to poverty at all.<sup>34</sup>

It is also worth noting that VCA in tourism was preceded by numerous less comprehensive but nevertheless relevant attempts to assess tourism's relationship with other market sectors, for example agriculture in the Caribbean,<sup>35</sup> and that some VCA in tourism contexts has tended to cover much the same ground as standard tourism master plans.<sup>36</sup>

While none of the above methods and concerns apply only to PPT, together they can be brought to bear in developing an understanding of how far tourism does or could contribute to poverty alleviation. The same can be said of other well established tourism policies and planning approaches, including co-ordination of ministries, development zones, special assistance to SMEs, demonstration projects, investment, capacity building, and so on, all of which have been claimed as essential to PPT.<sup>37</sup>

Sixth, PPT may not be focused on the very poorest of society. As Ashley notes, 'PPT is not an appropriate tool for reaching the poorest—those with fewest assets and skills who are least able to engage in the commercial economy'.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, it is also accepted that non-poor residents of destination areas too may benefit from tourism, even to a disproportionately greater extent than the poor: 'Only occasionally is PPT a matter of transferring gains...from one group to a poorer group. Thus helping the poor can mean directly helping the better-off clients or employers. Trying to avoid benefiting the non-poor is usually counter-productive'.<sup>39</sup> And again: 'as long as poor people reap net benefits, tourism can be classified as "pro-poor" (even if richer people benefit more than poorer people)'.<sup>40</sup>

Seventh, PPT practitioners define poverty in such a way as to include non-economic benefits. PPT strategies are thus considered to include

infrastructure gains, capacity building and training, and empowerment. Whilst the main focus is generally on direct employment, and indirect employment through micro-enterprise development, it is important to look at the range of potential benefits (and possible negative impacts) and to look at livelihood diversification—the focus on pro-poor tourism is on additional and supplementary livelihoods at the individual and household level. It is far less risky for communities to engage in tourism if that engagement complements their existing livelihood strategies rather than competes with or replaces them.<sup>41</sup>



Eighth, and despite the above reference to individual and household levels, PPT also focuses on wider collective benefits. For this reason the ADB, as well as having a US\$13.5 million 'pro-poor and equitable tourism' component in its Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector Strategy, primarily to develop community-based tourism, also has a budget of more than \$373 million, aimed at specific priority development zones, to improve tourism-related infrastructure, 'feeder roads, piers, and jetties leading to tourist attractions and poor communities, to spread the benefits of tourism more widely *and to reduce poverty*'.<sup>42</sup> Such infrastructural development, along with provision of potable water and efficient sewage systems, is a way of spreading benefits as widely as possible.

Finally, and following from the previous point, optimism, high-mindedness and concern for the welfare of the poor are not enough. PPT is not a case of NGOs and other representatives of civil society working *against* exploitative capitalism, or of the promotion of small-scale, community-based tourism *against* mass tourism. Rather, it is an orientation, covering nearly all forms of tourism, that requires commitment to assisting the poor, commercial viability of projects, and co-operation across all stakeholders—national and local authorities, public and private sectors, government, international organisations and NGOs—to achieve the aim of PPT, namely, to ensure that tourism brings net benefits to the poor.

### **Pro-poor tourism: the problems**

At first sight, criticising PPT might appear somewhat perverse. It seems so evidently morally correct and, after all, who could oppose the interests of the poor? However, some criticisms that can be levelled at PPT have already been made and, indeed, even its major proponents are careful to emphasise its limitations. More specifically, however, criticisms can be made on both conceptual and substantive grounds.

#### *Conceptual objections*

Three basic theoretical objections can be made to PPT. The first, and most mentioned, is that, in effect, its advocates are too comfortable with the status quo and thus miss 'the big picture'. Rather than attending to the need for structural change, redistribution of wealth and resources, and addressing international and national power structures, they tacitly accept a neoliberal approach to development and tinker with the capitalistic international tourism system at the edges, eking out a few resources for small, selected groups of the poor (or relatively poor) in destination areas.<sup>43</sup>

This criticism is correct in so far as advocates of PPT accept that the approach works best in development destinations where, first, a business case can be made, second, there is already a formal sector involving other tourism stakeholders and, third, conditions are right for capitalist development. However, this is less a theoretical objection than a statement of fact and, as Harrison and Schipani have indicated elsewhere, amounts to

little more than ‘a crude repackaging’ of 1970s and 1980s underdevelopment perspectives.<sup>44</sup>

That PPT advocates operate within a capitalist context is valid as a statement but not as a criticism. They make no claim to be theorists, and see themselves rather as practitioners attempting to improve the benefits that tourism brings to the poor, irrespective of their own beliefs, supportive or otherwise, about varieties of capitalism as political systems. Indeed, a similarly flawed argument could be directed at critics of PPT who voice their objections in books and journals which are part of profit-oriented enterprises.

Second, it can be argued that PPT approaches are conceptually blurred and/or ideologically or even morally indiscriminate, in that any kind of tourism (including sex tourism) that demonstrably increases net incomes of the poor or relatively poor would qualify as PPT.

Logically this does seem to be the case, as the definition of pro-poor tourism focuses on the results of tourism as they have an impact upon the poor, rather than on the type of tourism under investigation. However, current practice is rather different. PPT has no obvious record of supporting sex tourism and—with echoes of debates from the 1960s and 1970s about the extent social scientists should be partisan and, if so, whose side they should take<sup>45</sup>—its implicit commitment seems to be the development of business opportunities for the poor or the nearly poor, with little attention paid to, and even some hostility towards, big business, from which (unsurprisingly) PPT seems to attract little but token support. There are exceptions—for example the co-operation of some large UK companies with the UK’s Travel Foundation, an independent charity, and the positive findings of GTZ, the German Aid Agency, concerning PPT features of Sandals Resorts, Jamaica<sup>46</sup>—but they are rare and miniscule in scale. That said, the extent to which support for local (as opposed to international) capital should be an explicit priority for PPT adherents might well be a subject for serious consideration

Third, as with sustainable tourism development, the situation of PPT within debates over sustainability is theoretically imprecise and, generally, little discussed. As Chok *et al* indicate, the focus ‘on poor people in the South reflects a strong anthropocentric view . . . and . . . environmental benefits are secondary to poor peoples’ benefits’.<sup>47</sup> Echoing the critique that PPT favours capitalism, they suggest that it is ‘reformist’ rather than ‘radical’, and epitomises a ‘weak sustainability position’.<sup>48</sup> This is largely correct but (again) it is irrelevant. As indicated earlier, PPT practitioners make no claims for theoretical expertise or sophistication. Their concerns are more practical.

Fourth, PPT proponents tend to develop close links with NGOs and international NGOs (INGOs) and, like consultants generally, expend much time and effort obtaining external funding, largely from national and international aid agencies. Unfortunately, as a consequence, the theoretical marginality of PPT as an orientation and a series of practices is reinforced and reflected in the personal marginality of its practitioners, both to the business world of tourism and to academia. Lacking permanent academic posts and (relative) financial security, they rarely submit their work to academic peer

review and recognised academic journals, thus making future advancement in the academic sphere unlikely. They also tend to remain outside (and largely ignorant of) academic debates, with the added result that a huge body of academic writing is more or less ignored by PPT, for example, on enterprises and entrepreneurship, and the insights of adherents of PPT are similarly ignored or underrated in academic circles.

*Substantive issues*

Some substantive problems arise from the conceptual issues outlined above, and are summarised in Table 3. First, PPT’s focus on residents of destination areas is conceivably too narrow and parochial. By treating destinations as bounded communities, only the ‘poor’ or ‘near poor’ within the boundaries are considered suitable beneficiaries. By contrast, incoming migrants working in tourism and others living outside the boundaries are, by implication, unintended and undeserving beneficiaries, even though it is accepted that the economic position of non-poor locals may also be improved as a result of PPT initiatives.

There is accuracy in this criticism, but it arises more from practical constraints resulting from shortages of funds and from the need to limit the timeframe and scope of projects, including value chain analysis, than from any conceptual or ideological orientation.

Second, there are several arguments to the effect that PPT projects have simply not delivered benefits, or *adequate* benefits, to the poor, and that the

TABLE 3. Problems relating to pro-poor tourism

Conceptual or substantive	Problem	Comment
Conceptual	Tacitly accepts neoliberal status quo	True but irrelevant; not a theory
	Morally indiscriminate—any tourism can be PPT	Conceptually so but not in practice
	Theoretically imprecise, ‘reformist’, holding position of ‘weak sustainability’	True but irrelevant; not a theory
Substantive	Academically and commercially marginal	True
	Narrow and parochial; focuses only on bounded destinations	True but is more a financial than conceptual constraint
	Does not deliver (enough?) benefits to the poor	Little evidence available, but not <i>shown</i> to be more effective than non- PPT private sector
	No clear link of PPT with poverty alleviation; ‘normal’ tourism may also be PPT	Probably the case?
	Fails to consider equity or to try and change the overall system	True—but is quite explicit about this
	Ignores markets and commercial viability Ignores problems and PPT features of mass tourism	False; this is more so for CBT Does not set out to analyse such problems and has limited involvement with mass tourism

term 'pro-poor' tourism is a misnomer. Scheyvens, for example, is one such critic.<sup>49</sup> But, while her sources suggest tourism benefits have been distributed unevenly, they do not argue that the poor have received *no* benefits at all.<sup>50</sup> In any case, as indicated earlier, it is accepted by some PPT practitioners that, although the poorest in society may not benefit at all from PPT initiatives, some of the non-poor may do so.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, but more strongly, it has been argued that, by supporting capitalism, PPT initiatives 'undercut "sustainable livelihoods" and exacerbate, rather than alleviate, poverty'.<sup>52</sup> Again, however, there is no empirical evidence for this view, which seems to rest on the (unfounded) assumption that, if the plight of some of the poor is relieved, those who remain are somehow subjected to further deprivation. Even more radically (and cynically) it could be argued that the revolutionary cause would be advanced by the continued impoverishment of the poor, and thus *any* attempt to spread the benefits of tourism more widely serves capitalism and delays the onset of revolution. In response to such arguments, however, proponents of PPT can quite explicitly indicate that they are interested more in the absolute than the relative benefits to the poor of PPT, and that their interest is in the local picture and relief of local poverty, rather than in grandiose schemes for the overthrow of capitalism.

That said, it is often impossible to calculate the benefits PPT initiatives do bring to communities. As indicated earlier, rigorous assessments of incomes and expenditures in PPT projects (and, indeed, in many other forms of aid) are difficult to find; by definition intangible benefits are hard to calculate.<sup>53</sup> Systematic comparative monitoring of revenues against costs is rare, and where an attempt has been made to do this, as for a landmark ecotourism project in Lao PDR, it is clear that, according to strictly financial criteria, the private sector gives better value for money.<sup>54</sup> In such circumstances it is perhaps unsurprising that official recipients of international aid programmes, and sometimes donors, adopt PPT terminology and rhetoric but actually assess the success of aid programmes according to increased numbers of tourists rather than more formal PPT criteria.

Third, and in line with the above, it can be argued that no clear links exist between PPT initiatives and poverty reduction. Many countries most dependent on tourism for their GDP, especially islands and small states, have moved out of the 'least developed' category, as indicated in Table 4, even though they were not specifically targeted by PPT strategies. Similarly, surveys in destination areas consistently indicate that residents believe they have benefited economically from tourism,<sup>55</sup> although it is also recognised that enthusiasm sometimes wanes as dependency on tourism increases,<sup>56</sup> and many claims are made for the role of conventional tourism in alleviating poverty, even when specific categories of poor are not targeted.<sup>57</sup>

Clearly, initiatives not normally associated with PPT may perform pro-poor functions. It has been claimed, for instance, that, because they open up areas previously inaccessible to tourists, low-cost airlines are a major form of PPT.<sup>58</sup> Unpopular though this argument might be, especially among environmentalists, it clearly has some merit but, equally clearly, there are

TABLE 4. Tourism expenditure as % of GDP and export of goods and services for the top 25 countries, 2005 or nearest year

Country	Tourism expenditure as % of GDP	Rank	Human Development Status of country as ranked by UNDP for HDI	Tourism as % of	
				Export of goods	Export of services
Aruba*	43.5	1	n/a (High?)	55.8	83.4
St Lucia	41.8	2	Medium	500.0	88.5
Seychelles	38.8	3	High	75.6	73.1
Antigua and Barbuda	36.1	4	High	563.8	70.9
Maldives**	35.1	5	Medium	177.2	90.5
Bahamas*	32.2	6	High	414.5	86.1
Barbados	30.4	7	High	238.8	62.1
Vanuatu	27.3	8	Medium	244.7	72.7
Lebanon	26.4	9	Medium	257.6	54.6
St Vincent & Grenadines	24.5	10	Medium	244.2	66.9
Sao Tome & Principe	23.9	11	Medium	453.3	75.6
Fiji	23.8	12	Medium	n/a	n/a
St Kitts & Nevis	23.6	13	High	184.5	74.8
Croatia	20.4	14	High	84.8	76.9
Dominica	20.1	15	Medium	133.3	66.7
Samoa	19.5	15	Medium	650.0	69.6
Belize	18.5	17	Medium	63.4	69.6
Jamaica	18.4	18	Medium	107.2	76.5
Mauritius	18.4	18	High	55.5	73.5
Cape Verde	17.3	20	Medium	198.9	63.9
Cambodia	17.2	21	Medium	31.9	83.7
Malta	16.6	22	High	37.2	58.3
Cyprus	15.8	23	High	181.8	40.8
Grenada	15.6	24	Medium	5141.0	55.5
Jordan	13.7	25	Medium	40.9	77.0
For comparison					
France	2.0	102	High	9.6	36.4
Spain	4.7	61	High	27.2	56.6
USA	1.0	128	High	13.7	32.6

Notes: \*Aruba 2002 and the Bahamas 2003; \*\*This was much reduced because of the tsunami at the end of 2004. In 2004 tourism was 58.9% of GDP.

Sources: UNWTO, *Yearbook of Tourism Statistics*, Madrid: UNWTO, 2007; and UNDP, *Human Development Report*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan/ UNDP, 2006, p 413.

offsetting factors, including air travel's increased contribution to global warming. At local levels, too, tourism expansion may be reflected in increased tourist expenditure (which is actually or potentially directed to alleviating poverty) but might also cause damage to environmentally fragile sites, such as Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Such examples provide an additional indication of the need to consider wider, non-economic factors when implementing PPT projects.

Fourth, some critics contend that, to focus on those who are genuinely poor, PPT should focus more on equity. There is clearly some point to this

criticism, as unease is understandable if the relatively wealthy benefit as much, or even more, from PPT projects as the poor, who are the prime targets. However, PPT practitioners recognise the need for co-operation among numerous stakeholders and a wide range of policy and planning initiatives,<sup>59</sup> and there is nothing to stop governments committed to poverty reduction from using redistributive fiscal or other mechanisms to transform virtually any form of tourism into PPT. At the local level it is a feature of 'pro-poor tourism' to encourage government, aid agencies and the private sector to develop entrepreneurial linkages for the poor in the tourism supply chain.<sup>60</sup>

For redistribution really to be the focal point of PPT, closer attention would have to be paid to the role of the state, as well as to the wider world system. As in development matters generally, the impact of any PPT projects, even if on a large scale, is likely to be limited unless a state's entire tourism strategy is constructed around the aim of poverty alleviation. In effect, PPT requires a *developmental* state.<sup>61</sup>

Even more generally, international equity

necessitates both ideological and systemic change... Such ideological change would need to be accompanied by a change in the international system so that developing countries are granted greater decision-making power in institutions such as the World Trade Organisation.<sup>62</sup>

This is surely the case, but returns the debate to the issue of how far PPT initiatives can, on their own, overthrow capitalism. In the absence of an ideal developmental state and a more egalitarian global economic system, it is surely legitimate for advocates of PPT to note that they have to work in the real world.

Fifth, it can be argued that PPT has often failed to take sufficient account of commercial viability and access to markets, with NGO and INGO representatives preferring instead to seek aid money for projects which have been subject to little or no prior costing. Again, there is substance to this criticism but, as PPT advocates have noted, it applies most to CBT projects, with which PPT has often (but quite wrongly) been associated. These are not the same and, as Goodwin suggests, 'few [CBT] projects have generated sufficient benefits to either provide incentives for conservation—the objective of ecotourism—or contribute to local poverty reduction'.<sup>63</sup>

Sixth, as indicated earlier, PPT is accused of failing to confront mass tourism, either its 'problems' or its PPT features. The former include poor labour conditions in tourism destinations, 'anti-poor practices' of low wages, and so on.<sup>64</sup> Again, while such conditions clearly exist, PPT advocates can legitimately argue that they are not a campaigning pressure group. Rather, their role is to assist the poor to obtain more of the tourism 'cake'. It is also worth noting, however, that the existence of poor and exploitative working conditions does not invalidate the existence of an entire tourism industry, any more than abolishing the use of child labour in making carpets requires the cessation of carpet manufacture.

From a different perspective PPT advocates are alleged to have ignored the pro-poor characteristics of mass tourism which, as noted above and in Table 4, clearly makes a valuable contribution to many national economies. There is substance in this criticism for, while there are critiques from such pressure groups as Tourism Concern,<sup>65</sup> there are few detailed, methodologically sound empirical studies of mass tourism and its impacts. However, their absence is related less to a reluctance on the part of potential researchers than to the shortage of research funds or other support to analyse such linkages. When opportunities to study mass tourism and poverty alleviation have emerged, they have been taken, often in co-operation with major hoteliers and tour operators.<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, such co-operation is both minimal and exceptional. In general transnational company commitment is largely rhetorical, and hoteliers and tour operators have been even less prepared to offer funding assistance than have government and other aid agencies, on which PPT relies for relatively small handouts.

### Conclusion

In this paper an attempt has been made to examine the emergence of pro-poor tourism initiatives in the wider context of development studies, and to ask whether or not PPT is, in fact, a distinctive approach to tourism as a development tool. The conclusion is that it is *not* distinctive and, indeed, that it far easier to discuss what PPT is not than what it is! It is neither anti-capitalist nor hostile to mainstream tourism, on which it relies; it is neither a theory nor a model, and is not a niche form of tourism; it has no distinctive method, and is not only (and sometimes not at all) about the poor. Indeed, by incorporating individual and collective non-economic criteria in its definition of poverty, it returns us to the development debates of the 1970s and 1980s.

Critics of PPT have focused on several conceptual and substantive issues, and an attempt has been made in this paper to confront these objections and consider the extent to which they have some validity, as indicated in Table 3. In summary, however, critics have argued that PPT is based on an acceptance of the status quo of existing capitalism, that it is morally indiscriminate and theoretically imprecise, and that its practitioners are academically and commercially marginal. More substantive criticisms include accusations of narrowness and parochialism, a failure to 'deliver' benefits from tourism to the poor, and even to demonstrate clear links between PPT and poverty alleviation; critics also point to a similar failure to focus on equitable distribution of benefits or to make any attempt to change the overall system. It is also claimed that, in developing projects, PPT tends to ignore the crucial role of markets and fails to consider the need for commercial viability and, finally, that its adherents ignore both the 'problems' and the existing PPT features and potential of mass tourism.

The extent to which such criticisms are valid has been discussed in the paper. It has been concluded, in brief, that criticisms focusing on the

theoretical inadequacies of PPT are misplaced, simply because PPT advocates make no claim to be making any theoretical contribution, and that, in addition, they accept most of the more substantive criticisms, recognising that they are working within a context of international capitalism and that their initiatives may bring little benefit to the poorest members of communities.

The main question, however, is how far pro-poor tourism can be considered truly distinctive in its approach or methods, and the conclusion reached here is that, on both counts, it is found wanting. Rather, as it is currently framed and understood, PPT is a stated concern with the poor—a moral injunction—which is sometimes reflected in the application of fairly standard social scientific techniques of data collection and analysis by practitioners (as opposed to theorists) who have obtained funds to assess actual and/or future linkages of poverty alleviation and tourism, normally with a view to improving the individual or collective lot of ‘the poor’ (broadly defined). At the same time, it could also be described as a movement, an incipient pressure group, which consistently runs the risk of being hijacked by those who seek to claim the high moral ground, the more ‘responsible’ (and less capitalistic) tourism, and the more ‘moral’ product.

Does this mean that PPT has no future? That it is a perspective or orientation which should be abandoned? The answer to both questions, it is suggested, is negative. PPT practitioners have been remarkably effective in getting their message across and increasing the focus on poverty. In concentrating on a very simple—and incontrovertibly moral—idea, namely, the net benefits of tourism to the poor, they *seem* to have cut through much of the development debate and have appealed to many NGOs and INGOs, and numerous national and international aid agencies, whose officials have often incorporated PPT in their own missions. The fact that they have remained academically and commercially marginal is, at least in part, because of a lack of funding.

It is suggested here that the way forward for PPT proponents is to become part of the academic mainstream, to engage with the academic community, especially those involved in development studies, to submit their work to critical academic scrutiny, and to participate in the major debates. There is no future on the academic fringe. In return, the commitment of PPT adherents, their insistence on examining the most basic impacts of tourism *and* on bringing about direct and quantifiable change, will revive in tourism studies a moral dimension which was there in the 1970s and 1980s, but which has too often been subsumed under a welter of theorising.

Such an association would then allow those in the academic community with an active interest in tourism as a development tool to seek closer associations with national and international development agencies, and with major sections of international tourism. This would undoubtedly take time, but there is little future in eking out small grants and looking at the impacts of eco-lodges on small communities. International tourism is big business, its impacts are big and so too, arguably, are its contributions to poverty alleviation. And they could be greater.



The alternatives? PPT can stay on the academic and commercial margins of tourism, while its active practitioners continue to seek both profitable (and undoubtedly useful) consultancies. However, in such circumstances, their practical effects will be minimal and, quite probably, financially wasteful. When looking at tourism and its contributions, if any, to 'development', there is no quick fix, and no easy moral short cut. As in the 1970s tourism can be regarded as a blessing or a blight. Much depends on the observer, stakeholder, context, and on understanding the wider issues. The earlier theoretical debates have not gone away; rather, as globalisation has accelerated, they have become more complex. What continues to be needed is a balanced approach to, and research *over time* on, the development of tourism in its various forms, how it is articulated, and whom it benefits. This must be the basis of 'action research', targeted action and policy formulation. There is no future, or logic, in fundamentalism.

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