

The Anthropocene and what it means for managing outdoor recreation experiences

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The global COVID-19 pandemic has, first and foremost, been a widespread human tragedy. It has also been a global social and economic circuit-breaker. The disruption that it has caused has been all embracing, and from this has emerged a fleeting opportunity to rethink all aspects of environment, society and economy. In the context of tourism and recreation, the current crisis has been widely recognised as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to 'build back better' and, in doing so, to try to address fundamental global environmental challenges.

Twenty years ago, at the dawn of the new millennium Crutzen and Stoermer's (2000) article '*The Anthropocene*' argued that the Holocene had ended and a new epoch, for which humankind is responsible, had begun. Anthropogenic climate change, pollution, species extinction, exhaustion of soils, over-exploitation of resources, and population growth were seen as evidence of the Anthropocene. The concept of the Anthropocene has become prominent in the tourism and recreation literature. Many of the central rationales for the Anthropocene – such as climate change, resources depletion, and pollution – are also central concerns associated with pre-COVID growth in tourism and recreation. If our species is a geological force and the impacts of tourism and recreation are geophysical in scope, this significantly increases the ethical stakes associated with our fields of scholarship.

To begin, I will frame my presentation with an initial discussion and critique of the Anthropocene and what it means. In this discussion the locus of responsibility is important. It is necessary to question how particular topics of debate come to the fore and who stands to benefit from how public issues are framed. Visions of tourism and recreation development are interwoven with assumptions regarding who stands to benefit and who will bear the costs associated with those benefits.

I will use this critique to consider two of the most fundamental environmental challenges confronting tourism and recreation scholarship; carbon emissions and biodiversity loss. I will draw upon the emerging 'regenerative tourism' paradigm to consider how tourism and recreation can contribute to restoring and regenerating rather than depleting natural capital, while simultaneously building social, cultural and economic capital. This discussion has important implications for tourism and recreation, in terms of pathways forward in the quest for practices that respond with urgency to the these global environmental imperatives. This presentation will be illustrated with emerging examples from Aotearoa (New Zealand).

References

Crutzen, P. J. & Stoermer, E. F. (2000). The "Anthropocene." *The International Geosphere–Biosphere Programme. Newsletter*, 41, 17–18.