



THE ROLE OF ECO AND CULTURAL TOURISM IN SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL



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With a focus on the end destination, Neil MacOmish, Head of Digital, Media, Culture and Sport at Scott Brownrigg, explores the potential benefits of cultural led development for tourism.

The very notion that tourism in virtually all of its various forms could be sustainable appears to be an unsolvable paradox. Tourism in most forms assumes travel. Travel presupposes energy. If that energy is renewable, we may have a chance, but the means of production, materials used and all the other issues that are wrapped around processes make it very difficult to claim a truly net zero carbon outcome.

Yet, there is a strong and compelling argument that particular forms of tourism are without doubt, a benefit and can not only promote sustainable strategies, but actually be sustainable. The question therefore becomes, what can we do as architects and designers to promote and activate sustainable propositions within the tourism industry?

Within the UN's Agenda for Sustainable Development, tourism has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly, to all of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Tourism is directly mentioned in SDGs 8, 12 and 14 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production (SCP) and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, respectively. This is mirrored in the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) put forward by countries, who report on cultural tourism notably through the revitalization of urban and rural areas through heritage regeneration, festivals and events, infrastructure development, and the promotion of local cultural products. The VNRs also demonstrate a trend towards underlining

more sustainable approaches to tourism that factor in the environmental dimensions of tourism development.

However, we cannot ignore the travel aspect and particular, aviation. Aviation is responsible for 12% of global CO2 emissions from all transport sources, compared to 74% from road transport. Commercial aviation is responsible for about 2-3% of global carbon emissions. Whilst these figures seem modest, there is still a sense of 'climate anxiety' felt by some of those who do fly (there is an estimate that 805 of the world's population has never flown). In Sweden, a string of words have been coined to describe these concerns in recent years. There's the widely publicized *flygskam* (flight shame), which leads some to *smygflyga* (flying in secret) and others to *tagskryt* (bragging about rail over air travel). Emissions from aviation are likely to grow even with the development and introduction of synthetic or bio-fuels according to Professor Rafael Palacios at the department of aeronautics at Imperial College.

There was a well-published article regarding a Dane – Thor Pedersen, who managed to travel 202 countries in the world in a single journey without once catching a plane. It took four years – probably more time than most of us have – and included some experiences that none of us would like to share. Very few have either the means of the ability to travel carbon free – sailing to New York on an eco-yacht is a privilege few have access to.

It is therefore an absolute requirement that we design the infrastructure (including airports, terminals etc) to the most stringent of sustainable standards using as many passive techniques as possible. →

What is clear is that we are all more likely to have active empathy for environments and cultures that we have a shared experience with, where as visitors or 'guests', our primary motives are to discover, learn and experience tangible and intangible cultural attractions/assets. It is a learning of culture and language. Which also includes the participation of cultural activities, festivals and rituals. Discovery, experience and encounters. Art, music, literature and cultural heritage. This type of tourism is not only about the infrastructure and physical assets, but includes lifestyles, preferences and interests, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

Both ecotourism and cultural tourism are on the rise. The global ecotourism industry worldwide was estimated at 172.4 billion U.S. dollars in 2022. The sector was forecast to reach 374.2 billion U.S. dollars in 2028, registering a growth rate of 13.9 percent.

It is important to have clear definitions of these different types of tourism and have an understanding of what these groups might be seeking that is different from each typology. Cultural tourism refers to tourism in which the visitors' primary motive is to discover, learn and experience tangible and intangible cultural attractions/assets. It is a learning of culture and language. Cultural tourism - defined by the UNWTO as tourism centred on cultural attractions and products - is one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry, accounting for an estimated 40% of all tourism worldwide. Cultural tourism is also a major pillar of employment globally and is considered by many countries around the world as a core priority to stimulate job creation, notably for youth. The tourism sector as a whole is estimated by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) to contribute 330 million jobs – one in ten jobs around the world.

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This type of tourism is a leading priority for the majority of countries around the world - featuring in the tourism policy of 90% of countries, based on a 2016 UNWTO global survey. Most countries include tangible and intangible heritage in their definition of cultural tourism, and over 80% include contemporary culture - film, performing arts, design, fashion and new media, among others. There is, however, greater need for stronger localisation in policies, which is rooted in promoting and enhancing local cultural assets, such as heritage, food, festivals and crafts. This in turn, can help encourage appreciation of and

pride in local heritage, thus sparking greater interest and investment in its safeguarding.

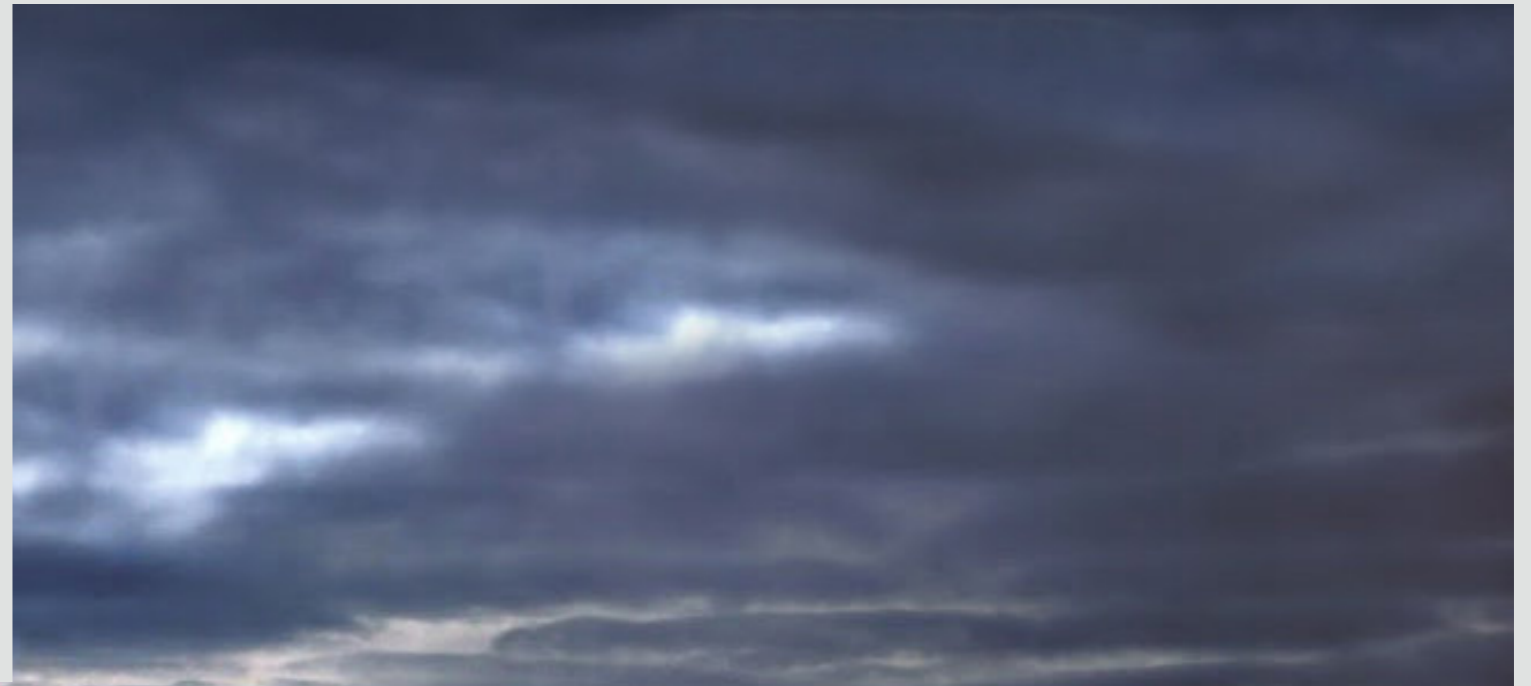
Tourism can also drive inclusive community development to foster resiliency, inclusivity, and empowerment. It promotes territorial cohesion and socioeconomic inclusion for the most vulnerable populations, for example, generating economic livelihoods for women in rural areas. A strengthened awareness of conservation methods and local and indigenous knowledge contributes to long-term environmental sustainability. Similarly, the funds generated by

tourism can be instrumental to ensuring ongoing conservation activities for built and natural heritage. Indigenous tourism can help promote and maintain indigenous arts, handicrafts, and culture, including indigenous culture and traditions, which are often major attractions for visitors. Through tourism, indigenous values and food systems can also promote a less carbon-intensive industry. →

This research and understanding has informed three of our projects that are grounded in eco or cultural tourism. They also include Aldo Rossi's notion of 'shaping' – the combination of place, artefact and event, very much in response to those ideas described where the greatest advantages of heritage and environment become more poignant and remain longer in our shared collective memories.

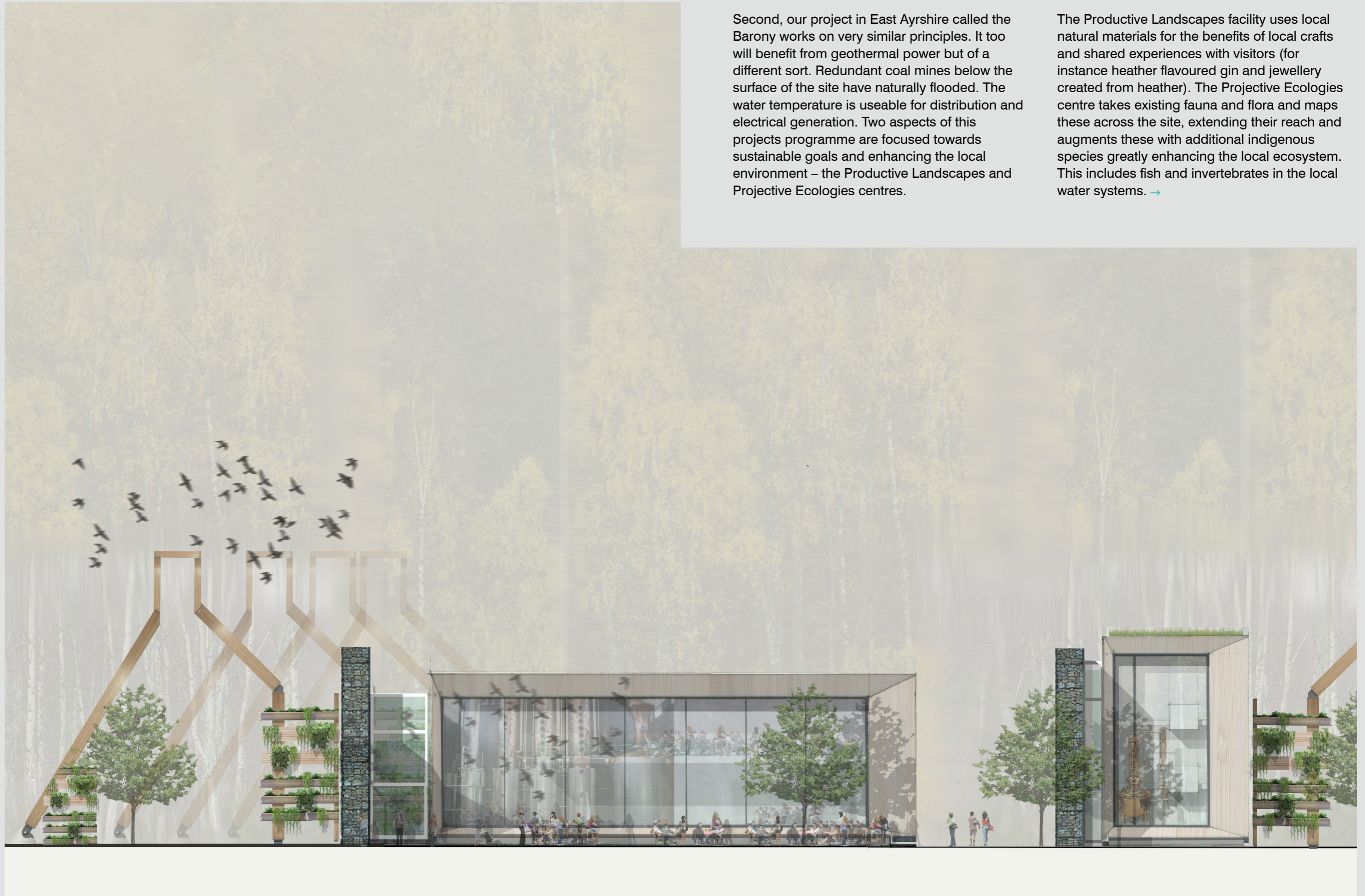
First, in our project for a Mauri Tribal group in Rotorua on North Island, we combine a programme around making and immersive

participation in food, language and performance. The architectural expression is one of a contemporary abstraction of traditional mauri ways of building and craftsmanship. The cultural pathways make constant reference to three significant cultural touchstones, The Mauri Meeting House, Te Puia (cultural centre) and Mokia Island in the middle of Lake Rotorua. This project also benefits from free geothermal power for the entire development. A market garden not only grows produce for the scheme, but equally for the wider community. →



Second, our project in East Ayrshire called the Barony works on very similar principles. It too will benefit from geothermal power but of a different sort. Redundant coal mines below the surface of the site have naturally flooded. The water temperature is useable for distribution and electrical generation. Two aspects of this projects programme are focused towards sustainable goals and enhancing the local environment – the Productive Landscapes and Projective Ecologies centres.

The Productive Landscapes facility uses local natural materials for the benefits of local crafts and shared experiences with visitors (for instance heather flavoured gin and jewellery created from heather). The Projective Ecologies centre takes existing fauna and flora and maps these across the site, extending their reach and augments these with additional indigenous species greatly enhancing the local ecosystem. This includes fish and invertebrates in the local water systems. →



Finally, our project in Dakhla, Morocco. This extraordinary place is where the Sahara meets the Atlantic. There are a number of groundbreaking technologies and programmes that make this project distinctive. Salt water greenhouses that capture water moisture from the air generate food not just for the resort but the local community. The process only uses 10% of the amount of water that traditional desalination uses and is not intrusive in marine environments. Oyster and mussel beds are being used to improve water quality, the local marine ecosystem as well and mitigate climate change and rising sea levels with the shellfish creating a local reef. Together with generating a new food source, the reef will be a tourist attraction for divers and research is going into using discarded shells and sand for digital printing on-site construction material. Pools for the facility use recycled seawater rather than placing an additional burden on limited local fresh water supplies.

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Each of the projects are described as ‘episodic’ masterplans – a route and journey where special moments occur. They each use similar architectural strategies that ‘touch the ground lightly’ causing minimal impact on the immediate environment. They all maximise passive environmental techniques, local ideas of craftsmanship and making and low carbon construction. They ground the visitor or guest experience in the authentic ‘genius loci’, events and culture that hopefully will demonstrate our own sense of ‘shaping’.

Most importantly, they are each tested and judged against the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals ●



