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## **Transformational tourism:**

Contributor to a needed just and sustainable world <sup>1</sup>



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## 1. Introduction

If you look at the science that describes what is happening on earth today and aren't pessimistic, you don't have the correct data. If you meet the people in this unnamed movement and aren't optimistic, you haven't got a heart. (Paul Hawken 4)

Today, an interesting interplay is happening between negative and positive forces regarding the future of our world. On the one hand, natural disasters, climate change, economic turbulence, global tensions, violence, social destruction, inequality, poverty, and moral decay are common. These events are signs of the troubling future that awaits us if we maintain existing trends. As Professor Willis argues, based on the publication *The Limits To Growth*, "if current rates of consumption and economic development continued, disaster would strike before 2100" (Willis 176).<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, a growing global movement is emerging. This movement is composed of people from all walks of life who are driven to create a more sustainable and just world (Hawken 1). As Christian ethicist Cynthia Moe-Lobeda acknowledges, "vast numbers of people around the world are creating ways of life that Earth can sustain and that do not impoverish some to the benefit of others" (115). Seeing those people at work, even in difficult times, is encouraging; it brings hope that social change can be achieved and that a brighter future is possible. This thesis aims to support these positive forces by looking at how tourism could contribute to the creation of a needed just and sustainable world.

To develop effective solutions it is useful to understand the following: the problem we aim to address, what a desirable change would be, and what impedes us to reach that change? Following a discussion on methodology in chapter two, in the third chapter the thesis

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<sup>2</sup> The Club of Rome modeled data up to 1970 regarding industrialization, population, food, natural resources and pollution and developed a range of scenarios based on trends out to 2100. They found out that if humanity would not take serious action on environmental and resource issues, the quest for unlimited growth and consumption would lead to the collapse of environmental and social systems before 2100. Research was done in 2014 by the university of Melbourne, which confirmed the Club of Rome's predictions with current data until 2014. The threatening future predicted in the 1970s is still a fact (Turner and Alexander).

examines the implications of environmental and social injustices and analyzes what brings us closer to the tipping points where ecological and social systems unravel irreparably, leading us to a worrying future. It will be argued that the capitalist consumeristic society, *which favors economic growth and consumption above the common good and environmental and social wellbeing*, is a major cause of the environmental and social injustices we face, and the troubling future that awaits us. As humans fail to incorporate capitalism within an ethical context and within Earth's limitations, it becomes problematic. The description of the problem is supported by an instrumental case study of the French Polynesian context. This case study is based on primary and secondary data, and gives insights into the identified problem. Furthermore, this case study also supports the argument for the need to develop a more just and sustainable world, where our societal systems function within an ethical context and within Earth's limitations. The fourth chapter will unpack this desirable change. In the fifth chapter this thesis analyzes the underlying causes that prevent people living in capitalistic societies from striving for change and participating in the growing and promising movement of those seeking a more just world. Author, Paul Hawken estimates the number of grassroots and non-governmental organizations striving for social and environmental justice at two million, as of 2007 (2). This number demonstrates the magnitude of people committed to striving for the common good and a brighter future, which is very encouraging. Nevertheless, it needs to be recognized that the majority of the population does not strive for change and continues to follow the status quo, perpetuating social and environmental injustices and cultivating the troubling future towards which we are marching. Understanding the forces underlying inaction will lay the groundwork for a solution that contributes towards a just and sustainable world.

The solution this thesis proposes is transformational tourism. It will be argued that by nurturing inner transformation, tourism can tackle the factors at the root of people's inertia, and consequently, contribute to the growth of moral and just citizens who strive for a more

harmonious and sustainable world. The thesis examines the transformative learning theory of Mezirow and proposes that tourism developers, based on the analysis of this theory, include various experiential elements in their tourism journeys to increase the potential for travelers to reach inner transformation. By completing the transformation process, travelers will be empowered to incorporate new attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors as dictated by their transformed perspectives, and build competence and self-confidence in their new roles and relationships (Mezirow "Understanding" 225"). As more and more people behave according to their transformed worldviews, make local changes in their communities, and inspire other people through their upright way of living to join the movement, ultimately society will transform (Kanning 134; Cho 178, 187). By cultivating inner transformation and human development among travelers, the tourism sector has the potential to intensify the movement of people who pursue a just and sustainable world. When people – guided by common and shared values – connect, they gain the capacity to move mountains and change the world (Logan). Likewise, tourism can indirectly contribute to societal transformation to a certain extent.

Envisioning how *tourism* could contribute to the development of a just and sustainable world is relevant for four reasons. First of all, considering the social and environmental instabilities we face and the undesirable future that awaits us if current rates of consumption and economic development are maintained, it is important to creatively examine the potentials of every sector, including tourism, to change current trends. Bornstein and Davis acknowledge that, "more people need to be involved in solving problems ... an adaptive society requires that many people construct and collaborate on solutions" (47). Secondly, Assadourian, Senior Fellow at the Worldwatch Institute, claims that the business sector, and thus tourism – along with governments, the media and education – can play a central role in redirecting cultural norms towards required sustainability (18). Therefore, the focus of this thesis is important since it examines how tourism could fuel a new, sustainable

and just societal paradigm. Thirdly, since contemporary tourism adds to the pool of injustices (Higgins-Desbioless 1193), and since tourism trends are growing (4.3% growth, bringing the total of international tourists to the record of 1,133 million arrivals worldwide) (UNWTO 4), it would be reasonable – considering the effects of injustices – to envision new directions for the tourism sector, which are less damaging and generate rather positive impacts. Envisioning how tourism could contribute meaningfully towards the development of a more sustainable and just world is an example of how the sector's positive impacts could be increased.

Besides, by fostering societal transformation towards social and environmental justice and sustainability, the tourism sector's negative impacts could indirectly be decreased as well, since the tourism sector will have to adapt to those new societal norms and values over time.

Lastly, this focus enables this thesis to contribute to the literature. According to Yvette Reisigner, author of the first book about transformational tourism (2013), more studies should be conducted to understand the relationship between transformational tourism, human development, sustainability and existence (228). Can transformational tourism result in human development and sustainable life and consequently our survival? Can we make our lives better through transformational tourism and learn to be better stewards of our home planet (Reisigner 228)? Those are questions that relate to my thesis' focus and to which I attempt to contribute my findings.

This thesis will conclude with challenges tourism developers will need to take into account when implementing transformational tourism as well as limitations of this study.

## **2. Methodology**

To develop the instrumental case study I analyzed a plethora of primary and secondary data sources, such as academic articles, reports, statistic records, local periodicals, and online

newspaper and forum articles.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, I conducted six semi-structured interviews with French Polynesians, French living more than ten years in French Polynesia, and *demis* (half French Polynesian and half French, Vietnamese, or Chinese). I purposively chose the participants for their ability to give insights on the French Polynesian context because of factors such as their lived experiences in that country, their area of qualification, their career position, and their critical awareness. One interviewee, for example, is a Tahitian dance teacher, passionate about her culture and a member of various community and environmental associations. Her knowledge about her culture and country's history as well as the social and environmental issues French Polynesia faces was a highly valuable complement to the case study. Similarly, the engineer at the fisheries department, the head of a local social movement, the sustainable development consultant, the professor, and the adolescent provided important information about historical, political, cultural, social, economic, and environmental aspects of the French Polynesian case. These insights all helped to explain the damaging impacts of capitalism – as we currently implement it – and support the argument for the need to develop a more just and sustainable system. French Polynesia provides a good context for the study because the small island of Tahiti in transition allows us to observe effects more clearly. I suggest, even though the case study method is not the best method to draw generalizations, that the findings from French Polynesian about the system's negative impacts are transferable to other countries that adopt capitalism, since stimulating continuous consumption and focusing on infinite economic growth above the common good and environmental wellbeing – which are the main systemic factors that engender environmental and social injustices – are common characteristics of capitalist consumeristic societies (Pellow 20).

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<sup>3</sup> The instrumental case study, according to Punch, examines a particular case to give insights into an issue or to refine a theory (121). I used this type of case study to gain insights about how adopting the capitalist consumeristic society the way we do leads us closer to the tipping points where social and environmental systems unravel irreparably.

The semi-structured interviews used open-ended and probing questions. This structure allowed the exploration of people's interpretations of, and meanings attached to the topics discussed. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to two and a half hours. I recorded the interviews and transcribed them or took notes directly after the interviews were conducted. I then analyzed the transcriptions. Themes emerged, uncovering patterns and connections, which complemented the secondary data, providing the opportunity to write a thorough case study. I conducted the interviews between May 2015 and February 2016 at different locations, including the park of Papeete and the interviewees' home location.

To understand and present the underlying causes that lead people from capitalist consumeristic societies to follow the status quo blindly and keep them from striving for change, I used data that I collected from secondary sources, such as academic journal articles and books. Furthermore, I used the findings of the case study and a focus group.<sup>4</sup> On the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 2015, I conducted a focus group during the educative festival Alternatiba Tahiti, which the social movement, Colibris Tahiti, organized. This event aimed to contribute to the transformation of the Tahitian society into a more environmental and human-friendly society, which tackles climate challenges and associated social and environmental issues. It intended to achieve this goal by creating consciousness awareness, connecting visitors, and stimulating individual and collective behavior- and attitude-adjustment (Alternatiba Tahiti). During this festival the organizers of the festival randomly invited visitors to participate in a one-hour focus group around the theme *be the change you want to see in the world*. Seven people, three females and four males, living in French Polynesia at the moment of the focus group, but originating from various countries and continents, joined the discussion. I was the facilitator, and Alain Bigot, who is a member of Colibris Tahiti, took notes. The analysis of

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<sup>4</sup> According to Punch, a focus group is “a well-facilitated group interaction [that] can assist in bringing to the surface aspects of a situation that might not otherwise be exposed. The group situation can also stimulate people in making explicit their views, perceptions, motives, and reasons” (147).



the focus group discussion increased my knowledge about the various factors that impede people from living according to their values, countering the status quo, and striving for change – even critically aware people who desire to live differently and contribute more meaningfully, as the participants seemed to be. Three months after the focus group, I contacted Hereiti Hopuare, one of the focus group participants, to double-check the accuracy of conclusions made about the focus group conversation and interactions, make any needed adjustments, and add new relevant insights.

Finally, to develop the proposed solution I analyzed the transformative learning theory of Mezirow, along with studies about the transformational capacity of tourism and the creative confidence and Appreciative Inquiry approaches. Studying and combining those various theories allowed me to produce the groundwork of a tourism experience that has the capacity to contribute to the growth of moral and just citizens seeking a sustainable world.

I also used primary data for this section, though to a limited extent. The focus group enabled me to observe group interactions and gain a deeper understanding of the power of rational discourse, which plays an important role in the transformation process (according to the transformative learning theory of Mezirow, as I will explain later in this thesis).

Furthermore, the interview conducted with Hereiti Hopuare enabled me to comprehend possible transformational effects the focus group had on her in the months following the group conversation, and analyze the capacity of rational discourse to further the transformation process. Finally, I also conducted an interview with an Australian girl who shared her transformational travel experience. I used her story and my own transformational travel experience to illustrate how the transformative learning theory of Mezirow plays out in transformational tourism experiences. While I used primary data to develop the proposed solution, it is mainly a theoretically founded solution.

### **3. An unjust and unsustainable society**

Adam Smith, father of modern economics, argued that if a large number of individuals would pursue their own personal interests and therefore profit, unintentionally it would maximize the wealth of all (Bornstein and Davis 46). However, this pursuit of self-interest could only result in the greatest happiness for all when linked to other people and the wellbeing of the whole community, since “no society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable” (Smith qtd. in Groody 16). Social injustices are devastating for the well-functioning of our current and future world. Poverty and inequality for example waste human potential, weaken the entire community, and put the whole human family at risk (Groody 10, 16). It is therefore important to take Adam Smith’s vision of a capitalist economy into account and to task. Smith assumed that capitalism would operate within an ethical context, and pursue the dignity of the human person, the common good, and the promotion of a just society.

In addition, this pursuit of self-interest should also not be at the detriment of the natural environment. Human beings are dependent on the environment for their survival, since Earth provides basic needs such as air, water, food, shelter, clothing, tools, and infrastructure for community life (Schut 81; Gnanakan 2). Hence, it is important to protect Earth, avoid environmental injustices, and create an economy that works within Earth’s limitations (Schut 81; McFague 96).

Nevertheless, today many societies have failed to embed their economic systems into an ethical context that takes account of Earth’s capacity. According to Moe-Lobeda, we live in a capitalist society that considers economic growth inherently good and necessary, since it adds to our economic well-being. Therefore, it ought to continue regardless of the unintended social and environmental consequences (Moe-Lobeda 102). Consumerism is inherently part of this economic growth since it drives the economy. It keeps capital flowing to make sure that markets do not freeze (Sklair 70; Edey 212). But, increasing levels of consumption and a

focus on infinite economic growth result in the exploitation of people and natural resources, social inequalities, and increasing pressures on Earth's systems on which humanity and countless other species depend (Assadourian 4, Clawson 127; Pellow 20-22). As we place profit, growth, finance, material wealth, and self-interest at the center of our concerns instead of ecological balance, distributive justice, sustainability, the common good, and solidarity, we and our modern societies create many environmental and social injustices. These injustices, which are intrinsically linked, lead to issues such as natural disasters, climate change, pollution, famine, wars, delinquency, and moral decay; signs of the troubling future that awaits us. In the process, we also lose sight of healthy relationships with the natural world, the other and the self. This is happening even in remote places like French Polynesia, which has been submerged in the capitalist consumerism paradigm through colonization, neo-colonization, and globalization – leading the country to an unstable future.

The next section examines French Polynesia as a case study for how integrating capitalism within our livelihoods and societal system – without incorporating it in an ethical context and within Earth's limitations – leads to environmental and social injustices, as well as unravels healthy relationships. Consequently, it also fosters an unsustainable and unstable future. The conclusions made from this case study will further sustain the need to move towards more sustainable and just societies.

### **3.1. The French Polynesian context: case study**

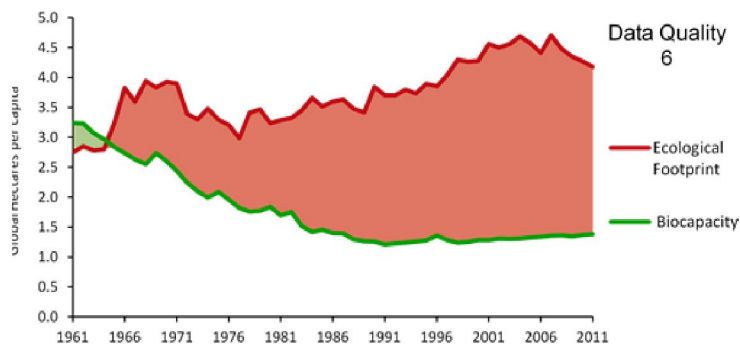
Behind the paradisiacal pictures of pristine nature, dancers, floral fabrics and cocktails on the beach, lies a French Polynesian reality that is far more complex and nuanced. The country, especially Tahiti, has become highly westernized and adopted a capitalist consumeristic system as opposed to its self-sustaining lifestyles of the past. The arrival of McDonalds and SUVs on Tahiti signal the onset of the capitalist consumeristic society. The picture becomes clearer when looking at the country's import statistics, ecological footprint, climate change challenges, waste management issues, focus on economic growth, and its social issues such

as poverty, inequality and delinquency. This case study reveals that the capitalist consumeristic society is a fact in French Polynesia and that it engenders many social and environmental injustices, leading the country to an unsustainable and unstable future.

### **3.1.1. Consumerism, ecological footprint, injustices and unsustainability**

Mizaël acknowledged in his 2013 TED talk that if every inhabitant on this planet would live as French Polynesians do, we would need not 1.6 planets as the world currently does, but 3 planets (Faucon). French Polynesia's ecological footprint is large; the country uses more resources than what is renewably available within its own borders. The country relies on resource surpluses concentrated in ecological creditor countries, with higher biocapacity than they use (Global Footprint Network). In 2014 only, \$1.4 billion of goods were imported, while \$116,676 of goods were exported from French Polynesia (Fenua Economie 150). It is clear that French Polynesians live above their means, leading unsustainable lifestyles. In fact, French Polynesia became an ecological debtor at the beginning of the 1960s (see fig. 1). This is the period when the international airport was opened, welcoming many tourists, and when the television made its entrance in French Polynesia (Kahn, "Tahiti" 14). It is also the period when nuclear tests started and when France injected a lot of money in French Polynesia for the importation of goods to encourage local acquiescence (Kahn, "Tahiti" 15). French Polynesians started to consume abundantly because money and the availability of imported goods made it possible, but also because unconsciously the system influenced them to do so (Huan). It is the period when the capitalist consumeristic society became a fact and when unsustainability and dependency became part of the story as well.

Figure 1  
Ecological Footprint of French Polynesia



Source: Global Footprint Network; “Footprint For Nations: French Polynesia”; *Global Footprint Network: Advancing the Science of Sustainability*; Global Footprint Network, 20 November 2015; Web; 13 January 2016.

Ancient Polynesians fully utilized their environment while managing it sustainably. Strict enforcements via taboos and hunting seasons ensured sustainable use. They knew that their finite land resources had to be nurtured and cared for, understanding what it would provide for them in return (Lebon; Page 3, 18; Kahn, “Tahiti” 10). But, when aspiration for Western-style livelihoods and demands for material products increased from the 1960s onwards, the French Polynesian society and its communities’ livelihoods changed profoundly. Cash economies supplanted traditional subsistence economies (McIntyre and Heileman 6, 71; Page 18, 21). French Polynesians shifted from gardening, fishing, and building their own houses to becoming a working class population that buys its food and houses and takes on loans, becoming in the process more and more dependent on imported goods and the money France injects into the country (Kahn, “Tahiti” 15; Trémon 284; Colombani). Their dependency on money and imported goods increased when many could not repay their loans, losing their lands to (French) foreigners and consequently losing the opportunity to cultivate their own food (Kahn, “Tahiti” 15). The forfeited lands, along with the increasing demands for imported goods and aspiration for Western-style livelihoods, further increased colonial dependency and dependency on the Western capitalist consumption system. It puts self-sufficiency and sustainable livelihoods further out of reach.

In addition to these changed livelihoods and increased dependency, McIntyre and Heileman, authors of the *Pacific Environment Outlook* report, argue that the introduction of the capitalist consumeristic society resulted in the depletion of natural resources and ecosystem degradation (6, 71). Figure 1 illustrates this assertion. Increasing levels of consumption results in the exploitation of natural resources and increasing pressures on Earth's systems (Assadourian 4). These environmental injustices disrupt ecological systems on which humanity and countless other species depend (Assadourian 4).

### 3.1.1.1. Climate change challenges and unsustainability

The shift in one particular ecosystem service, climate regulation, is especially disturbing for French Polynesia.<sup>5</sup> The effects of climate change become more and more apparent. French Polynesian islands need to tackle issues of sea level rise, increased sea temperatures, and extreme weather events (Cozette; Stern). The sea level in the Pacific Islands currently rises every year between 6mm and 12mm (Polynesie1ere.fr). Oceanographers and climate change researchers Meyssignac and Cazenave argue that the sea level might even rise between 50 and 80 cm by 2100 (105). Consequently, entire islands might be devastated, leading French Polynesians to become climate refugees (Assadourian 5; Clawson 79). The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme claims that the most substantial impacts of climate change on the Pacific Islands will include “losses of coastal infrastructure and land, more intense cyclones and droughts, failure of subsistence crops and coastal fisheries, losses

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<sup>5</sup> A debate exists about the actual causes of global warming – or what we now call climate change – and the seriousness of this phenomenon. One group of scientists argues that humans dangerously accelerate climate change due to the fossil fuels they burn and the CO<sub>2</sub> this releases, which heats the atmosphere. Another group of scientists, say that various factors, besides CO<sub>2</sub> and human impact, cause the climate to change, such as the sun, clouds, orbit variations and other inputs. They also argue that it cannot be predicted if climate change will dangerously lead to catastrophe. Nevertheless, both groups agree that the climate is changing to a certain extent and increasing levels of CO<sub>2</sub> caused by humans play a role in it, although this might not be the main reason why the climate changes (PragerU). For the purpose of this study I am focusing on how climate change studies impact French Polynesia. Research demonstrates that climate change already affects the islands and some predict significant negative impacts for the country's future.

of coral reefs and mangroves, and the spread of certain diseases” (1). The population will face stresses related to fresh water scarcity, food security issues, and public health problems (Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme 1). Researchers seem to argue that climate change will affect French Polynesia in significant negative ways.

The disaster that might strike French Polynesia before 2100, might well relate to the challenges of climate change. Nevertheless, the Global Footprint Network explains that other potential disasters in the world could be resource loss, ecosystem collapse, famine, poverty, debt and war (Global Footprint Network). While humans’ increasing pressures on Earth’s systems are not the only cause of climate change or other challenges the world faces, it plays an important role and will have serious consequences for humans’ self-preservation and well-being. By destroying the environment we could ultimately destroy ourselves (Groody 258). Adopting consumerist lifestyles and a capitalist system without working within Earth’s limitations contributes significantly to our and other countries’ unstable future.

The previous graph shows that, as French Polynesia continues to adopt the capitalist consumeristic system, environmental degradation and unsustainability remains a fact in the country (see fig. 1). It will be hard to change the trend, since the consumption society offers many conveniences and since French Polynesians have lost their lands, challenging the return to sustainable and self-sustaining lifestyles. Due to these changes, they also lose their connection with nature and the understanding that the environment needs to be nurtured for the resources it can provide (Page 3). A healthy relationship with the environment unravels.

### **3.1.1.2. Waste management issues and unsustainability**

Increased levels of consumption and imports also result in rising levels of waste (Pellow 21). This waste is often not returning to the system to provide input for a new cycle of life and further production, as the Earth’s system does, but becomes an externality. It creates sight pollution and releases toxic chemicals into the environment, polluting the air, groundwater, land, and potentially harming humans and non-human beings (Schut 76-77; Clawson 146-

147). As the air, groundwater, and land on Earth get polluted to respond to our consumeristic needs, countries and the world at large will face social and environmental challenges in the future. This is the case in French Polynesia too.

Sabrina, who is a core member of the social movement Colibris Tahiti and who is also in the process of developing a recycling project, reports that over the past ten years waste has increased by 40% in French Polynesia; this has led to waste management issues (Lebon). For example, on Makemo, an atoll in the Tuamotu archipelagos, waste such as sheet metal, organic waste, plastics, and car batteries are discarded around the island, creating dams up to 1.50 meters high. This abandoned waste releases toxins that are harmful for humans and the environment. Although a waste management system exists on this atoll, discarding waste continues. Furthermore, the collected recycled and non-recycled waste is burned on the same dumping ground ten kilometers from the village. Again, the toxins released harm inhabitants and the environment. The situation observed on Makemo is not unique; various atolls and islands deal with the same issues (Loubet “Déchets”).

While the council of ministers argue that the waste management system on Tahiti is structured and in accordance with the law, firsthand accounts reveal that it still fosters pollution and potential harm to inhabitants (Lebout “Ordures”; Lebon). Sabrina shared that waste on Tahiti is mainly buried or exported to New Zealand, Australia or Asia, including India, Malaysia, and China. Burying waste can be dangerous; buried organic waste can create gasses that, with the sun’s heat, can result in fires (Lebon). Furthermore, transporting waste to other countries shifts the problem to other people. This becomes especially problematic when waste is shifted to poor countries that do not have the necessary infrastructure to treat and manage the waste (Pellow 12). According to Pellow, while 90% of hazardous waste today is produced in industrialized countries, most of this waste is shipped to developing countries, where those citizens and low-income persons experience the waste’s negative impacts on their environment and health (8, 15). By shipping its waste to Asia, French



Polynesia may be participating in this global social and environmental injustice.

All in all, the waste management issues in French Polynesia demonstrate that consumerist lifestyles engender social and environmental injustices, which negatively affect Earth and the lives of many humans and which leads the country to an unsustainable and unstable future as the air, groundwater and land get more and more polluted.

### **3.1.2. Economic growth, injustices and unsustainability**

The ecological footprint of French Polynesia is not only high because of the significant consumption levels, but also because of the country's focus on economic growth, which engenders natural resource depletion and environmental and social injustices. Pellow argues that capitalist societies seek infinite economic growth, which requires increasing extraction of materials and energy from natural systems; such extraction has negative social and ecological consequences (20). Alain Bigot, project developer at the Fisheries Department of French Polynesia and member of Colibris Tahiti, further contends that in the development sector and Polynesian society at large, economic prosperity is favored at the expense of the environment, the culture, and social wellbeing (Bigot).

The events happening around the rivers of Tahiti reinforce this. Companies extract stones from the rivers to supply large projects with building materials. These projects purport to boost the economy again, but many believe they will only benefit a few of the powerful rather than the majority of the local population (Loubet "Taharu'u"; Colombani; Lebon). Besides, the extractions destroy the riverbanks and rivers' ecosystems, putting the population living close to the rivers at risk for possible floods, soil erosion, diseases, and drinking water supply problems (Tuarau). The association Ia Ora Taharuu, which strives for the protection of the Taharuu River, further explains that due to extractions there is a risk that rivers lose their capacity to discharge their energy progressively in natural flood areas. Furthermore, when the natural meandering of a river is eliminated, the canalization will also enhance the speed and therefore the strength of the current. If in addition landslides or trees obstruct the river, the

event can become deadly (Association Ia Ora Taharuu). This is exactly what happened mid December 2015 on the East coast of Tahiti. Heavy rainfalls engendered landslides and rivers escaped their riverbanks at high speed, causing floods, the destruction of more than 60 homes, and one death (Webmaster; Jaques).

These examples support the finding that the economic aspect of the sustainability continuum is indeed favored over environmental and social wellbeing in French Polynesia, leading to environmental and social injustices, which engender environmental and social problems. The environment is damaged and inhabitants' wellbeing is put at risk to economically benefit a limited number of recipients. In addition, the fact that people are willing to damage the environment and put other people's lives at risk for economic prosperity or consumption (as demonstrated earlier) reveals that healthy relationships with the natural environment and others in the community are broken.

### **3.1.3. Poverty, inequality, injustices, and unsustainability**

Poverty and inequality are present in capitalist consumeristic societies. They are directly related to what Pope John Paul II called "inadmissible overdevelopment" (Moe-Lobeda 34). For example, in the USA, a symbol of the capitalist consumeristic society, the wealthiest 1% owns nearly 43% of financial wealth while the poorest 80% owns only 7% (Moe-Lobeda 34). Economically impoverished and working-class populations are often oppressed for the economic, social and political benefits of a few privileged (Pellow 37-38, 40, 49-50; Shiva 568). Moe-Lobeda claims that we have adopted an economic order which "enables a few of us to consume a vast proportion of Earth's life-enabling gifts, while many others die or suffer for want of enough" (34). These social injustices are also present in French Polynesia.

Poverty in French Polynesia is high. The statistics institute of French Polynesia (ISPF) reveals that 19.7% of French Polynesians in 2009, from the Windwards Islands only, live under the poverty line. This poverty is especially present among unemployed people living in rural areas, and uneducated French Polynesians (ISPF). Since poverty positively

correlates with unemployment, it is estimated that French Polynesians living under the poverty line in French Polynesia was even higher than 19.7% in 2014; only 61,519 people were employed in 2014 as opposed to 66,978 in 2009 (Fenua Economie 172).

ISPF also revealed that in 2009, the Gini Coefficient, which measures inequality within a country, was 0.40; this means that French Polynesia has a highly unequal income distribution (ISPF). Twenty percent of the richest households of the Windwards Islands earn approximately 47% of the Islands' total revenues, while the poorest 20% of households only earn 6% of the total revenues (ISPF). Trémon argues that socioeconomic inequalities follow ethnic boundaries (282). Those in power are the French and the *demi* – people of mixed ancestry (both Tahitian and French, Chinese, English, American, German etc.). Those without power are primarily indigenous Tahitians (Kahn, “Tahiti” 9). The French occupy influential administrative, educational, and law enforcement positions, while indigenous Polynesians are at the bottom struggling to make a decent living (Anonymous; SOS Children's villages; Schuft 27). One of the interviewees, who preferred to stay anonymous, further acknowledges that poverty and the ever-increasing gap between wealthy and poor leads many French Polynesians into delinquency and illegal practices (Anonymous).

### **3.1.3.1. Delinquency and unsustainability**

Delinquency has been a growing problem in Tahiti. From 2013 to 2014 alone delinquency among youth in Tahiti grew from 16% to 20%. Common types of delinquency include violence, theft, and implications in illicit substance trafficking (Tahiti Pacifique Hebdo 22-23). Tahitian adolescent, Vaeana, and Tahitian sustainable development consultant, Lina – who were both interviewed for this thesis – shared that Tahitian youth envy the consumerist products they see around them such as cars, iPhones and branded clothes. However, they cannot afford those goods due to the poverty in which they are entangled. Consequently, as they feel frustrated and in order to meet their needs, they steal, earn money illegally or become violent (Choune; Huan; Tahiti Pacifique Hebdo 24, 27).

The issue of delinquency, as a consequence of poverty and inequality, supports the point that “no society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable” (Smith qtd. in Groody 16). This section also demonstrates that the capitalist consumeristic society plays an important role in fostering the social injustices of poverty and inequality, and the related issue of delinquency – leading the country again to an undesirable future.

#### **4. An alternative society: social and environmental justice and sustainability**

The French Polynesian case study demonstrates that as French Polynesians adopted the capitalist consumeristic system and mentality – without incorporating it in an ethical context and within Earth’s limitations – their country became more and more entangled in a socially and environmentally unjust, unstable, and unsustainable context. As they continue with current practices, along with other countries that embrace capitalism, they will march towards an even more worrying future.

There is obviously a need to strive for a different societal paradigm. Economic anthropologist, Terrence Loomis thoughtfully remarks that: “the pathway to ensuring the future wellbeing of humankind and the planet lies not in limitless growth, consumption and more-market, but in a creative reintegration of economy, society, and ecology” (Loomis 903). Similarly, Assadourian claims that we need to transform our consumerist cultures to center on sustainability in order to prevent disaster (2). In addition, theologian Sally McFague emphasizes the need to include sustainability and distributive justice in our societal system (97-101). There is a need to adopt sustainable practices and to make sure that humans and other living beings have access to Earth’s resources upon which survival depends; only then can sustainability be reached (McFague 99). Furthermore, McFague remarks that current economists will have to realize that we are dependent on each other and become unique individuals through help from and response to others. The alternative societal system needs to

focus on the universal common good, not solely on the individual (McFague 100). As these authors argue and as the case study demonstrates, what we require is an economic system and a society at large that does not threaten Earth's life-sustaining capacity and that works within an ethical context. Such a system and society should value the dignity of the human person, the common good, and the promotion of a just society. The economy, money, self-interest, and greed should not be central to our mode of life; rather the environment and humanity should regain a predominant position if we aim to build a peaceful, life-generating, and sustainable world.

Achieving this change will require some effort from everyone. Author, professor and priest Daniel G. Groody argues that justice needs to be worked out at all levels of society, from the local to the most global level, and from the family to the government (114). While it is the role of governments to make sure that adequate policies are implemented to create more just and sustainable economies, we at the individual level also have a role to play. Rabhi, founder of the social movement Colibris, and theologian and social activist Sider, argue that we need to develop models of simpler lifestyles and a theology of enough (Rabhi "Foreword"; Sider 238-239). We should start to be happy with enough and focus on meeting our basic needs through simple and healthy means (Rabhi "Foreword"). They argue for a need to change our lifestyles, including our values, attitudes and behaviors. Change involves reducing our consumption patterns since, as acknowledged above, increased consumption results in tons of waste and the exploitation of people and natural resources for our goods' production. This harms people and pressures Earth's systems on which we are all dependent.

There are practices that we can adopt in our day-to-day lives to live in a more just and sustainable way, step by step, according to writer and activist, Julie Clawson. She suggests that we could, among other things, reduce our reliance on oil and gas and decrease the waste we make to counter injustices and environmental devastation (87, 157). Buying more ethically and fairly-produced products to demonstrate our desire for more socially and

environmentally just production is another everyday individual action we could undertake (Clawson 46). This desire could also be expressed by raising our voice against corporations, asking them to take responsibilities for their unethical or polluting practices (Clawson 139). Furthermore, we could also build awareness in our direct surroundings about the destructive effects of the society in which we live and our lifestyles that drive it (Clawson 47).

Changing our lifestyles towards eco- and socio-responsible lifestyles and promoting justice where and when we can will aid the transformation of the economic system and society (Clawson 26, 138; Rabhi 62). It is important to not minimize the significance and power of those individual actions. Our individual actions may *appear* relatively ineffectual, but they are essential. According to Moe-Lobeda, while the social structures leading to injustices cannot be dismantled by individual actions, they cannot be dismantled without them (62). Furthermore, harmful social structures can be dismantled because human beings have established them, so they can also change them (Moe-Lobeda 240; Groody 108).

Restoring our broken relationship with the natural environment and with one another will be essential to changing our lifestyles, values, attitudes and behaviors and working towards this just and sustainable world. The French Polynesian case study demonstrates that broken relationships lead us to contribute to unsustainability and injustice and impede our efforts to become just and moral citizens. However, a healthier relationship with the environment might enable us to accept our dependency on the natural environment and stimulate us to become good stewards of the environment who voluntarily limit their environmental exploitation and degradation. As moral philosophers and environmental advocates Moore and Nelson acknowledge, humans are part of the earth's system and are therefore dependent on its thriving (xix). They claim, "we cannot be concerned with humans and human futures without at the same time being directly concerned for all that supports those humans and human futures" (Moore and Nelson xix). Equally, a healthy relationship with the other will enable us to realize our interconnectedness with the other and foster values

of love, care, and solidarity, which are needed to avoid social injustices (Gnanakan 3; Groody 118). Groody acknowledges that: “what is done to one is done to all; when any are losing, all are affected; when any are deprived, all suffer; and when any are empowered, all benefit” (69). Realizing our interconnectedness can motivate us to care for others, as we understand that some of our actions, which negatively affect members of our human family (and the Earth), could also negatively affect us. Restoring our broken relationships along with adopting values, attitudes, and behaviors in harmony with these relationships will be crucial.

The next section will examine how our relationships with the natural environment and the other have been broken. Furthermore, it will expose other underlying reasons why the majority of the earth’s population does not strive for needed change and continues to sustain social and environmental injustices, fostering the worrisome future described above. Understanding the forces underlying inaction will provide the knowledge to develop an effective solution, which could empower people towards action and contribute to the creation of a just and sustainable world from the bottom-up.

## **5. Reasons for our inertia**

Much of our inaction has to do with manipulations, leading to moral oblivion. Assadourian claims that the cultural systems people are born into primarily guide human behavior (8). Leading cultural actors and institutions as well as the participants in the cultures shape and reinforce dominant paradigms – shared ideas and assumptions – that guide those cultural systems (Assadourian 8). These actors and institutions are primarily the government, businesses, the media, and educational institutions (Assadourian 11). Likewise they are able to influence us in such a way that we too often fail to recognize or consciously ignore the devastating effects of our consumerist lifestyles. In particular, the economic and political powers obscure reality, as they have a vested interest in keeping injustices hidden from the consciousness of the perpetrators (Moe-Lobeda 66, 86; Pellow 60; Sklair 66). As Moe-

Lobeda acknowledges, “advanced global capitalism stokes the compulsion to consume, quietly coiling chains of bondage around its unwitting objects” (Moe-Lobeda 59). “People are drugged,” according to Groody, “to settle for superficial appearances instead of searching for qualities that are more enduring and valuable” (74). Sklair supports the claims of Moe-Lobeda and Groody, suggesting that there is a transnational capitalist class at work with a goal of keeping global capitalism on course for its own interests (64). Corporations will organize the production of commodities and the services necessary to manufacture and sell them. The state will create the political environment within which products and services can be marketed irrespective of their origin and quality. Finally, institutions such as the media will disseminate the culture-ideology of consumerism through advertisement, which produce the values and attitudes that create and sustain the need for the products (Sklair 64, 66, 68; Moe-Lobeda 100; Assadourian 13-14; Groody 25). In addition, while those who advocate for capitalism and consumerism have considerable influence in the media, they also have influence in education, corporate boardrooms, financial institutions, and international institutions, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Harvey 72). Assadourian’s greatest critique of schools is that they fail to educate students about the effects of consumerism on people and the environment. They also fail to teach media literacy and the understanding that the human species is as dependent on a functioning Earth system as every other species (Assadourian 15). It is also important to acknowledge that many claim that World Bank projects and IMF policies have been designed to benefit the wealthy at the detriment of the poor (Bornstein and Davis 9; Vreeland 271). The WTO and its trade policies have been criticized for being partly responsible for the problems of stagnant wages, job losses, growing income inequality, and environmental degradation (Capling and Higgott 280). The participation of the transnational capitalist class in these influential institutions seems related to their desire to keep their power and wealth in place.



The cultural paradigm that has been put into place influences our values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Through this paradigm and our lack of critical awareness, the way we interpret, live in, and understand the world is directed. We will for example continue to participate in environmental and social injustices because we have been taught to only see certain things and not others (Schut 74). Schut and McFague suggest that capitalism wants us to be individual consumers who only see the bottom line of progress (Schut 77-78; McFague 97). Pellow says that modernity wants us to believe that the ecological and social problems created by the production and consumption system can be managed while still having all the conveniences associated with modern capitalism; he says, however, that this is not possible (18). Furthermore, Twist claims that the money system creates the fear of scarcity (33). This fear of scarcity drives humans to do ecological and social harm as they have been told that there is not enough for everyone and that they should care for their own, even at the expense of others (Twist 35). A second myth the capitalist system perpetuates is “More Is Better”. This myth is a driving force behind a competitive culture of accumulation, acquisition and greed as well as violence, war, corruption, and exploitation on Earth (Twist 35-36).

While the capitalist consumeristic society certainly manipulates us through societal structures and the flawed assumptions it conveys, it needs to be recognized that people put this system into place and that we always have a choice. The fallen nature of mankind lies at the root of this societal manipulation and is another underlying reason why people continue to participate in social and environmental injustices. Moe-Lobeda explains that the fallen nature of mankind – which in Christian Theology is known as both personal “sin” and structural “sin” – stimulates people to serve perceived interests regardless of the cost to Earth, others, and their own wellbeing and regardless of what would displease God (Moe-Lobeda 58, 59). Likewise, people are for example able to ignore the environmental and social injustices their consumerism lifestyles create or to adopt delusional superiority attitudes to legitimize their actions and meet their perceived interests. Similarly, the transnational

capitalist class is able to manipulate citizens to consume and seek infinite economic growth through societal structures in order to maintain their power, even when being aware of the devastating effects this has on others and the environment, fostering structural sin.

When personal and structural sin are present, it is clear that relationships with others and the environment will be broken, since people will seek personal fulfillment regardless of the social and environmental injustices they engender by doing so. Furthermore, in the presence of sin, our relationships with the self and, from a Christian perspective, with God are broken too (Moe-Lobeda 58). For example, because of personal and structural sin we are seeking to accumulate possessions, as we perceive it as an interest regardless of the cost to Earth, others, ourselves and what would displease God. Nevertheless, according to Groody, “true wealth consists not in the accumulation of goods, but in their distribution to others in need, not in cultivating one’s bank account, but in cultivating one’s heart, not in having more but in being more” (85). Accumulating possessions is not truly in our interest and it actually takes us away of what could bring us greater happiness, namely love and right relationships with the self, others, the community, the natural environment, and from a Christian perspective also God (Sider 238-239; Groody 82). In search of profit and self-interest we lose ourselves and lose sight of the common good, other people, and God – and thus right relationships (Groody 11, 18). Broken relationships are an issue since they create disorder, chaos and injustice (Groody 24). Just, peaceful and harmonious relationships are essential to moving toward a better human future where there is abundant life for all (Myers183).

Besides fostering a restoration of broken relationships with others and the environment – enabling people to realize their interconnectedness with the rest of the world – and cultivating critical awareness to avoid being manipulated by our capitalist society, it seems also necessary to deal with the fallen nature of mankind in order to enable people to restore the various relationships, resist perpetuating social and environmental injustices, and strive for a more just and sustainable world. Repenting of sin is possible according to Moe-

Lobeda (78). It requires critical reflection in order to recognize the presence of sin in our daily lives and how it hides under the guise of good, inevitable, divine mandate and social necessity. Furthermore, it requires moral consciousness and the recognition of our interconnectedness with others and the environment, which enables us to avoid participating at social and environmental injustices, as acknowledged earlier (Moe-Lobeda 61, 78). As a Christian, Moe-Lobeda also acknowledges the need to union with God in order to repent of sin (140). This thesis will not go deeper into this perspective to avoid taking a religious position and since I lack the necessary understanding about the Christian perspective as an atheist. Nevertheless, empowering people to acquire critical awareness and moral consciousness and to recognize their interconnectedness with others and the environment, as Moe-Lobeda suggests, should already greatly help people to repent of sin.

Those who are more critically aware and try to live moral lives in harmony with the other and the environment still seem to lack confidence, strength, courage, and competence to truly counter the status quo and strive for a more just and sustainable world. Participants in the focus group shared that even though they would like to change the system that keeps them from living according to their values, various factors make it difficult to move towards that direction. They feel under pressure from their parents, who want their children to participate like everyone else in society – to study and find a job. They also talked about the incomprehension of friends. Participants further shared that they often feel rejected and judged; as a result, they started to believe that they were “weird”. This led them to follow the status quo again in order to be reaccepted. Furthermore, participants also felt pressured to find a job because they believed that they needed money in order to meet their basic needs. But, this oftentimes put them in this system they would like to change (Focus Group). They were afraid to take the risks and accept the uncertainty that is linked with stepping outside the status quo. Other factors challenge people to pursue change, as following authors present.

Tom Kelley, author of the bestselling *The Art of Innovation*, and David Kelley, founder of IDEO and the d.school at Stanford acknowledge that the fear of judgment can keep us from taking greater responsibility for our choices. So, too, can the fear of failure (183). Furthermore, sometimes people feel resistant to change; they fear the unknown, are not always convinced of the alternative, or do not understand the alternative option well enough to implement it (Kelley and Kelley 180). Theologian Miroslav Volf also acknowledges that we are uncomfortable with anything that blurs accepted boundaries. This leads us to reject any idea that might blur the boundaries (Volf 78). Finally, there is also the fear to oppose the current status quo because of the possible reprisal of the wealthy and powerful who have a vested interest in keeping society as it currently functions (Bornstein and Davis 21). Thus, to resolve those various challenges that ultimately impede action, people need to be empowered; their competences to envision and implement just and sustainable change, and confidence in their abilities and in their alternative perspectives, need to be unleashed. Strength and courage to follow a just and sustainable vision should be nurtured.

As I take above factors underlying inaction into account, I am interested to look closer at tourism's potentials to foster inner transformation, which enables one to restore broken relationships, and cultivate moral consciousness, critical awareness, competence, confidence, strength, and courage. By restoring and cultivating this, I will argue that tourism could contribute to the growth of moral and just citizens who counter the status quo and pursue a more harmonious and sustainable world. Likewise, fostering inner transformation among travelers allows tourism to potentially and indirectly participate at societal transformation.

## **6. A way forward through tourism**

### **6.1. Critiques on contemporary tourism**

Tourism might not seem like the most common way to foster moral and just citizens of the world or to create societal change. First of all, as tourism professor and author Smith argues,

most current tourism experiences offer us a flight, instead of equipping us with a fight mechanism (65). The tourism industry offers us escapism, instead of harnessing its potential to equip travelers with the necessary mechanisms to face reality and change it if necessary. Secondly, one could argue that tourism adds to the pool of injustices created in the world instead of actively countering them. This is in great part true when we consider contemporary tourism, such as mass tourism, which follows the market fundamentals of our capitalist consumeristic society (Higgins-Desbiolles 1193, 1194). The current tourism industry recognizes tourism as being a tool to foster economic growth; key to this growth is the tourist's consumption (Higgins-Desbiolles 1194). As we have seen earlier, focusing on economic growth and consumption above the common good and environmental wellbeing creates negative social and environmental injustices. As the examples below demonstrate, it is by following the norms of our current society that contemporary tourism adds to the pool of injustices.

Sex tourism is an obvious example of the injustice tourism can create. Locals, often impoverished females, are exploited for the benefit of a few privileged rich males. In less extreme cases, the commodification of a culture for the pleasure of tourists can confuse locals' identity as well as negatively affect their pride and dignity (Kahn, "Illusion" 201; Theobald 88). Furthermore, locals are sometimes forcibly displaced to make room for new resorts. Their access to food and income is at the same time taken away, forcing them to migrate to the cities and to work in exploitative environments, which can have devastating consequences on the family's well-being (Moe-Lobeda 28). Tourism often also creates various types of pollution. Water pollution is an example. The industry creates tremendous amounts of waste and sewage, which are often discharged in an unprocessed form, polluting the rivers and seas and possibly damaging the soil and groundwater supplies (Theobald 92). This negatively impacts locals, as well as the natural environment. In addition, it is not uncommon to hear about cases where the tourism industry will use already scarce amounts of

water for tourist facilities, restricting locals' access to any source of potable water (Theobald 92). Tourism also contributes to air pollution. Long distance flights, primarily used for tourists, emit 700 million tons of carbon dioxide every year, around 3% of the global carbon emission (Rowe). Furthermore, jet skis, quads, and 4x4s used for tourism activities add to this pollution. So, locals in developing countries are often oppressed, exploited and exposed to the negative social and environmental impacts of the current tourism industry. On the other hand, tourism industry leaders and tourists are able to harness tourism's benefits for their own private wealth accumulation and well-being (Higgins-Desbiolles 1193, 1195).

This focus on economics and business, and related injustices, hide the transformative capacities of tourism. It hides the potentials of tourism to meaningfully contribute to this world. Reisner contends that transformational tourism "allows the development of awareness of one's own existence and connection with the self and others, which often require one to become more sensitive to the surrounding environment and the world" (27). Furthermore she notes, "travel and tourism can shift our perspective on life and change the course of our knowledge, values, attitudes, and behaviors" (xii). Travel and tourism also contribute to learning, opening one's mind, fostering understanding, enrichment, growth, and development. It offers opportunities for self-exploration, self-discovery, and a revision of self-understanding. Finally, travel and tourism have the power to develop a non-ethnocentric value system, and enhance a sense of humanity and tolerance (Reisner 27). We will look at what tourism could be – freed from its current economic focus – and we will realize that tourism projects, which incorporate certain experiential elements, have significant individual and societal transformational capacities.

## **6.2. Inner transformation, societal transformation, and tourism**

This thesis argues that societal change starts with inner transformation. According to civil rights leader John Lewis, the true work of social transformation starts within our own heart and mind (1-2). The works of Groody and Quinn, also support this concept and belief.

Groody highlights that it is from inner transformation that we can work for transformation on a broader scale (156). Quinn emphasizes that people will only be able to change others if they change themselves (19). As demonstrated earlier in this thesis, many people need to restore their broken relationship with the other and the environment; acquire moral consciousness and critical awareness to recognize and repent of personal and structural sin (which will lead to a needed restoration of their broken relationship with the self and God); and build courage, strength, confidence, and competence, in order to be able to live more justly and sustainably, withstand pressures of the external system, and engage in the transformation of it. Without this inner transformation the willingness and ability to foster societal change will be lacking.

Once inner transformation begins to take place, our way of being in the world is dramatically and irreversibly altered. It is shifted towards a better understanding of the self, our self-location, and our relationship with the other and the natural world (Morrel and O'Conner xvii). According to Reisner, through transformation we reach a greater sense of integration between one's true self (identity) and the world (22). Furthermore, transformation enables us to comprehend societal systems; envision alternative approaches to living; and shift our understanding about the possibilities of social justice, peace and personal joy (Morrel and O'Conner xvii). Inner transformation goes beyond self-development and personal fulfillment, towards a sense of social and environmental responsibility; this is essential for societal transformation (Smith 57).

Kanning's study about lifestyle transformation from international backpacker travels, for example, demonstrates that through their travel experiences the backpackers discovered their existential authentic selves in relation to the world. They also gained a deeper understanding about societal issues such as societal pressures that push people to conform to a status quo that is not inherently good (Kanning 130). Their new understandings and the inner transformation they experienced altered their ways of being; in the process, they reconfigured their lifestyles by relocating to areas where public transportation was available,

or where biking to work was feasible. Similarly, career directions were altered. Some of the backpackers pursued a career in naturopathic medicine or non-profit work, where they felt they could make a difference (Kanning 133). Inner transformation, as Kanning demonstrates or as Mezirow's transformative learning theory maintains, fosters new worldviews towards greater social and environmental responsibility, according to which people start to behave and make choices (Mezirow, "Overview" 92; Mezirow, "Critical Reflection" 14, 18).

Likewise, people are moved towards healthier relationships with God, the self, the other, and the natural world, as they gain awareness about societal systems (structural sin), their self-location (personal sin), and their interconnectedness with the rest of the world, which enables them to live more socially and environmentally just lives, away from sin. In addition, inner transformation empowers people to acquire the necessary strength, courage, confidence and competence to envision and implement just and sustainable approaches to living.

As more and more people behave according to their transformed worldviews and make changes in their lives and communities, ultimately society will transform – especially when a large number of people do this (Kanning 134; Logan; Moe-Lobeda 275). The civil rights movement, for example, demonstrates that societal change can be achieved when people decide to act according to their transformed worldviews, even when these worldviews oppose the current status quo.

It is also important to acknowledge that transformed people will in turn inspire others and more effectively promote transformation among others. Cho highlights this idea: "for it is through our living that we bring credibility to our beliefs" (178), "you lead by how you live", and "a life of integrity resonates with people" (187). The focus group conducted on Tahiti in November 2015 came away with the same conclusion. Participants agreed unanimously that it is by changing ourselves that we will be able to inspire others. We create change by example (Focus Group). As transformed people inspire others to transform as well, a ripple effect occurs, increasing the number of individuals who behave according to a new



worldview and ultimately change society over time. This is one way of looking at how inner transformation can foster societal transformation and how societal change can be achieved.

I will argue that tourism has the capacity to facilitate inner transformation and consequently, to participate in societal transformation. Kanning's study, shared above, demonstrates this already to a certain extent. The next sections will look more closely at how tourism is capable of doing that by analyzing Mezirow's transformative learning theory. Mezirow is a professor of adult education at Columbia University. Based on this analysis, I will argue what tourism developers – who aim to use tourism's transformational potentials for the common good – should implement in their tourism program to increase its transformational capacities.

#### **6.2.1. How does inner transformation take place?**

It all starts with a cognitive dissonance. Reisner contends that transformative learning in tourism “takes place where one can engage with the unknown, with unfamiliar places, people, and their activities ... in places that provide a significant contrast to the home locality and ordinary experience” (28). The contrast challenges one's current frame of reference or worldview – boundary structure that guides our actions and enable us to perceive and comprehend new data – since the person cannot accommodate the experience in her current frame of reference (Reisner 28; Mezirow, “Adult Learning” 141, 144; Kanning 126). Mezirow calls this a “disorienting dilemma”. It is the first step of his transformative learning theory, which I will use as a framework to explain how a tourism experience could be made transformational (see table 1) (“Understanding” 223-224; “Critical Reflection” 14).

Table 1

## Phases of transformation

- 
1. A disorienting dilemma
  2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
  3. A critical assessment of assumptions
  4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and others have negotiated a similar change
  5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions
  6. Planning a course of action
  7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
  8. Provisionally trying out new roles
  9. Renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships
  10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective
  11. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
- 

Source: Jack Mezirow, "Understanding transformation theory." (*Adult education quarterly* 44.4 (1994)) 224. Print.

As a result of this disorienting dilemma, the person starts to engage in self-examination – critically examining beliefs, values, and long-held assumptions about the self, cultural systems, the workplace, ethical decision-making, or feelings and dispositions – to deal with the cognitive dissonance encountered (Mezirow, “Understanding” 224; Reisigner 20, 28; Kanning 126). This can also enable one to recognize personal and structural sin. This critical reflection is a key element of Mezirow's transformation process, since interpretations, beliefs, and consequently our behaviors, are transformed through critical reflection when they are not viable (“Theory to Practice” 7, 9; “Critical reflection” 18; “Overview” 92). As a result of this reassessment, new frames of reference and a more integrative perspective – one that is more developed, inclusive, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective – will emerge, according to which people start to behave and make choices (Mezirow, “Overview” 92; Mezirow, “Critical Reflection” 14, 18; Reisigner 23).

#### 6.2.1.1. Critical reflection

Critical reflection is essential since it empowers people to see the issues of our current system, “what is”, and hopeful alternatives, “what could be”, enabling us to update incorrect beliefs.

Three interviewees, who are all engaged in the social movement Colibris Tahiti, shared that it

is by questioning the current system and informing themselves about alternative ways of living that they acquired consciousness about the need for a more just and sustainable world (Colombani; Bigot; Anonymous). Through critical reflection people are enabled to see the injustices our society perpetuates and hides – including how structural and personal sin can be interwoven in our daily lives – and realize that the way things are is not the way things must be, countering hegemonic vision (Moe-Lobeda 114-115). In addition, critical reflection enables people to envision, or at least see, alternative paths of living that move towards greater equity and ecological sustainability (Moe-Lobeda 115; Schut 78, 81). With this awareness, people are less likely to abandon their human potential and take up the possibility to contribute to a thriving, equitable, and healthy world. Especially recognizing “what could be” is of importance to march towards a brighter future. It is an ingredient for moral power as it creates hope for a better future. Moe-Lobeda remarks that seeing “what could be” is “an antidote to the denial, hopelessness, and the powerlessness that may ensue with daring to see *what is*” (132).

As we recognize the existence of communities who construct ways of life that Earth can sustain and that do not impoverish some to the benefit of others, human energy can be redirected (Bornstein and Davis 35). Seeing the vast number of communities at work, who construct viable and vibrant alternatives, can empower us to belief that a brighter future is possible and that societal change can be achieved. According to Bornstein, all social change begins with the belief that social change is possible (Bornstein). It is when people start to believe that alternative visions and social change are attainable that they also will be, since what we think and believe influences who we are and how we experience life (McFague 98; Twist 32). To resist and transform systems of injustice it is important to empower people to see “what is”, share positive pathways to enable them to see “what could be”, and foster the belief that change is possible.

Tourism can provide tourists the opportunity to encounter communities that are

creating ways of life that are more sustainable as well as socially and environmentally just, as a result of their awareness about “what is”. Higgins-Desbiolles argues that tourism’s ultimate capacity is “its ability to foster contact between people” (1205). By providing experiences that enable us to see “what is” – the social and environmental justices that social institutions do not want us to see – and “what could be”, travellers could encounter difficulty accommodating the experience into their current frame of reference. This experience creates a disorienting dilemma and opens up the path to transformation. As travel writer, Pico Iyer states, “We travel, initially, to lose ourselves; and we travel, next to find ourselves” (Iyer).

#### **6.2.1.2. Tourism and the transformative learning theory**

Reisigner contends that tourism types such as nature-based, adventure, rural or agriculture, religious, yoga, wellness and spa, educational, volunteer, cultural, and heritage have the capacity to engender a “disorienting dilemma” experience and critical reflection as well as restore broken relationships (29). In the presence of nature, for example, people are often forced to reflect, connect with nature, confront their limitations, and become humble before forces that are greater than them and beyond their control (Reisigner 29). Groody acknowledges that, “extended periods of time in the outdoors help renew our relationship with Earth” (256). Furthermore, farming experiences give people the chance to experience simple and pure lifestyles in harmony with the environment (Reisigner 29). Groody remarks that simplicity can free us from the slavery of excessive human wants, and help us focus more on being than on having, on the quality of our heart rather than the quantity of our possessions (258).

Yoga and wellness bring calm and peace; these activities allow us to connect with our inner selves as well as reflect on existential questions in order to find our calling. We are then able to tap into and unleash inner reserves of energy and enthusiasm that helps us to surmount many challenges (Kelley and Kelley 161). Furthermore, yoga and wellness get us in touch with what is inside and outside us; this results in greater knowledge and love,

connectedness with self and others, and concern for something more than the self, empowering us away of sin (Reisigner 29). Educational and volunteer tourists, when faced with global challenges, acquire more awareness, consciousness, new values and responsibilities, and become more mindful beings with a new understanding of life (Reisigner 29). Finally, encountering different cultures encourages deep experiential encounters that foster individual-culture transactions (Reisigner 28). This final example could be clarified through my own journey.

Through my travels and the various places I have lived so far, I had the opportunity to interact with people of various cultures, backgrounds and different sets of beliefs. As I am willing to hear others and let their voices and perspectives resonate within me, I come to understand them, my culture, and myself better. The different perspectives I am confronted with oftentimes create a cognitive dissonance that I cannot incorporate in my current frame of reference. However, as I engage in self-reflection to make sense of this dissonance, I gain the ability to detect layers of self-deceit about my culture and myself, and eventually, to readjust my perspective and identity in light of others' perspectives – to rebuild new frames of reference and a new, more integrative perspective (Volf 51-52, 110, 213). Through disorienting dilemmas, fostered in this case by travel-related cultural encounters, and through self-reflection, I acquired more consciousness about the weaknesses of the current capitalist consumeristic society, about the potentials of alternative sustainable ways of living, about my place in relation to others and the environment, and about my own life's purpose. These new understandings stimulated me to adopt a more socially and environmentally responsible and just life. Both Aldred and Cho suggest that when we receive the opportunity to encounter people of various backgrounds and sets of beliefs, we are offered a chance to expand our worldviews, recognize our own brokenness, and be helped to set things right in our own lives (Aldred; Cho 52). My personal narrative demonstrates the potential of tourism to foster transformative learning.

Abbey, one of the interviewees of this study, gives another illustration of tourism's capacity to be transformational. Her story demonstrates how a disorienting dilemma resulted in a new frame of reference, according to which she started to behave. In March 2015, she joined a two-week cultural educative tour, Second Nature Asia Pacific, organized in South-East Asia. She shared that she was surprised to see how the very poor people they met and for whom they volunteered were nevertheless smiling and friendly. They obviously enjoyed life and were extremely grateful for all the little things they received in life. This observation made her reflect, and when she came home she felt that she had to learn to be happy with those small things and buy fewer unnecessary things. While everyone was buying 700 AUD dresses for the graduation, she decided to use one of her sister's dresses. Abbey said: "These encounters definitely made me think. We do not need all these things" (Roberts).

Abbey's travel experience challenged her assumptions regarding materialism and happiness. As she could not accommodate the picture of poor people being happy and grateful in her current frame of reference, she engaged in critical self-reflection. She allowed the voices and perspectives of others to resonate within her; likewise she gained the ability to understand them, as well as herself and her own culture, better. As a result of these new understandings, she developed a new frame of reference and perspective according to which she started to behave; she began searching for happiness beyond materialism. This tourism experience, which fostered a disorienting dilemma and critical reflection, enabled Abbey to reconnect more with her self and others and learn more about the meaning of life and its hidden realities. She was enabled to see "what is", namely that happiness and joy are not necessarily related to materialism. In addition, she saw an alternative of how life could be, which after self-reflection, changed her values, and behaviors. Her story reflects Reisner's conclusions, namely that educational and volunteer tourists acquire awareness, new values and responsibilities, and become more mindful beings with an understanding of life (29).

Encounters with others to foster the transformative capacity of tourism are important

in the above examples. However, as Reisigner acknowledges, nature, simple living, and spiritual practices can also stimulate the phases of the transformative learning theory – they can all foster a disorienting dilemma and critical reflection, which lead to consciousness, critical awareness, and new perspectives more in harmony with the self, the other, the natural world and consequently also God as we move from personal interest and sin to a greater sense of social and environmental responsibility (28-29). In addition, they can all be elements of the tourism experience.

### **6.2.2. Need for more than disorienting dilemmas and critical reflection**

Once people acquire new truths and acknowledge these truths, it becomes more difficult to return to previous assumptions about society, the self, and ethical decision-making. Consequently, new frames of reference and a more integrative perspective develop. Mezirow remarks that people start to behave and make choices according to their new frames of references and perspectives, as seems to be the case for Abbey. However, this thesis previously acknowledged that for those who recognize the need for change, hopelessness; powerlessness; social pressures; and fear of failure, judgment, and reprisal of the wealthy and powerful, often impedes them from pursuing any change (Moe-Lobeda 90-98; Focus group; Kelley and Kelley 183; Bornstein and Davis 21). Sometimes, even critically aware people lack confidence, competence, strength, and courage. Yet, these forces are needed to live following newly acquired values, stand outside the norm, withstand external pressures, join communities that pursue change, and ultimately change the system (Quinn 17, 19).

The transformative learning theory of Mezirow includes additional steps to complete effectively the transformation process. Mezirow acknowledges that human interactions and communication – which I use interchangeably with rational discourse – must complement the critical reflection stage in order to have our new understandings validated (see table 1). These elements enable us to gain confidence in our new beliefs (“Understanding” 225).

Furthermore, he acknowledges that the transformation process requires one to explore

options for new roles and actions, plan a course of action, and acquire knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan (see table 1) ("Understanding" 224). Therefore, this thesis argues that transformational tourism experiences, aimed at engendering moral and just citizens, should – in addition to fostering a disorienting dilemma and critical reflection – offer rational discourse opportunities, and creative confidence and appreciative inquiry workshops. These activities will provide travelers the opportunity to envision a more sustainable and just alternative future and lifestyle in accordance to their newly acquired principles and values. They will also help travelers acquire the necessary competence, self-confidence, courage, and strength, which increase the capacity to strive for this alternative future and lifestyle. It is only when one fully incorporates newly acquired attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors as dictated by their new transformed perspective that the transformation process will be completed (Mezirow, "Adult Learning" 146; Reisner 19).

#### **6.2.2.1. Human interaction and communication**

Human interaction and communication are central to the process of creating meaning. Mezirow acknowledges that, "the personal meanings that we attribute to our experience and the new understandings formed are acquired and validated through human interactions ... and human communication" (qtd. in Reisner 21). Through rational discourse we assess the validity of our newly acquired transformative insights and beliefs with others; as we reach consensus regarding their justification, these insights and beliefs are validated (Mezirow, "Critical Reflection" 10; Mezirow, "Adult Learning" 145). It is important to acknowledge that we may encounter others with new perspectives, arguments, and evidence that stimulate a reassessment of our beliefs. Furthermore, as social norms and cultural codes change, our beliefs are subject to change as well. Therefore, our newly acquired frame of reference and beliefs are provisional and might evolve overtime (Mezirow, "Overview" 91; Mezirow, "Adult Learning" 145; Mezirow, "Critical Reflection" 11).

The focus group conducted illustrates well the power of rational discourse.



Participants who did not know each other beforehand shared their stories and frustrations about living in our current society and about the various factors that impede them from living according to their values, and consequently, to experience fulfillment. They came from different backgrounds – one from Africa, another from China, three from Europe, and four from French Polynesia. Some were students, others unemployed, one was a traveller, and others worked for a business, for the government, or in the IT sector. Nevertheless, despite their differences, participants related well to one another because they shared similar personal understandings and feelings. Furthermore, they reached a consensus about the validity of their beliefs and perspectives. The validation of personal meanings increased their confidence in their understandings, beliefs, and perspectives. One participant, Hereiti, said that prior to this conversation she thought that she was weird, because nobody could understand her. However, now that she met like-minded people and her beliefs were validated through consensus with others, she acknowledged that she did not feel weird anymore (Focus group). In addition, in an interview that was conducted with Hereiti three months after the focus group, she acknowledged that the conversation also increased her self-confidence, since the other focus group participants reflected a more positive image of her than she had about herself. In addition, she realized that they were able to move beyond the stage in which she currently feels stuck, giving her hope for a better future (Hopuare).

Besides observed increased confidence, participants also became more open and built relationships with one another. A synergy emerged as participants discussed small changes they could implement in their daily lives to feel happier and live more in line with their values. Furthermore, some shared contact details and spent additional time together at the event where the focus group took place. Through interaction and communication similarities with participants who look seemingly different became more apparent. Aldred explains that when people share from their heart and show some vulnerability, true relationships can take place (Aldred). Noe further adds that when we develop authentic relationships with one

individual or a group we start to feel the interconnectedness between all of us (169).

Realizing our interconnectedness is important because if we lose the understanding that we are connected to each other, or when we take ourselves out of the pattern of interdependence with the other and do not recognize the other as belonging to this pattern, the stage to exclusion is set and we will likely continue to participate in social and environmental injustices (Volf 67). Realizing our interconnectedness with the rest of the world, as acknowledged earlier, can impel us to care for others and the natural world.

The importance of creating possibilities for human interaction and communication becomes clear from the above paragraphs. Rational discourse furthers the transformation process as it helps to validate our newly acquired frame of reference and beliefs, fosters confidence, and restores broken relationships with the other and the self. Reisigner acknowledges that when we interact and communicate with others about our transformative insights and when we realize that others have similar “revelations”, we develop confidence as well as openness, since we build relationships and connections with others who share our understandings (21).

While tourism offers the opportunity to encounter people, it does not always provide travelers the opportunity to deeply interact and communicate with others about the disorienting dilemmas they experience and the new perspectives and understandings evolving from these experiences. The international backpackers in Kanning’s study shared that the interviews conducted for his research were the first time they participated in rational discourse concerning their transformative experiences (128). Engaging in rational discourse about a transformative travel-related experience becomes especially difficult on the return back home. Hall explains that people are oftentimes busy with their own lives and do not have the time or are rarely interested in listening to the traveler’s experience, making it difficult for travelers to really express or share the growth they have experienced (292). Kanning’s study also revealed that people back home did not go through the backpacker’s

transformative experience and therefore they could not fully understand the transformative insights the backpacker gained. One of the participants stated: “When you’ve been through the similar experience you can share it only with people who have been through it also” (Kanning 128). Tourism developers will have to make sure to incorporate rational discourse opportunities in the tourism experience to give travelers the opportunity to interact and communicate with one another about their transformative travel experience and learnings. This could help travelers validate their newly acquired understandings, foster their confidence, and restore broken relationships with the other and the self.

However, having confidence in one’s own beliefs and understandings about the world does not mean that we can put our newly acquired beliefs fully into action. The interview with Hereiti supports the idea that rational discourse is not enough to fully enable people to act on their beliefs and principles. Hereiti explained that the focus group increased her consciousness about the fact that she lived for the purpose of being accepted by others, instead of following her own principles and beliefs. For example, while she is vegetarian, she would eat meat when invited at a dinner to avoid the judgment of others. As she realized her attitude and acquired more confidence during the focus group about herself and her principles, she decided to remain truthful to herself no matter what other people might think about her (Hopuare). Hereiti also shared that she would like to decrease her impact on the planet by living more sustainably. However, lack of time and money, as well as confidence and courage, keep her from acquiring the necessary knowledge and developing projects that would enable her to live a more sustainable life and contribute to a more just world (Hopuare). This interview helps explain how rational discourse can help people validate their frames of reference and behave according to them. Hereiti acquired confidence, courage and strength to live more in harmony with her true self, no matter what others might think about her. However, it seems not to be enough to counter all external pressures, develop her projects, and act according to her principles and values in each aspect of her life. Yet, fully

integrating new attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors as dictated by new transformed perspectives is required to complete the transformation process and become a moral and just citizen that contributes to a sustainable world (Mezirow, “Adult Learning” 146; Reisner 19).

Moving through the transformation process involves thus several additional steps. Mezirow acknowledges that the transformation process also requires one to explore options for new roles and actions, plan a course of action, and acquire knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plan (see table 1) (“Understanding” 224).

The following sections will demonstrate that creative confidence and appreciative inquiry workshops can respond to this need and can further foster necessary competence, confidence, strength, and courage. Therefore, transformational tourism programs, aimed at engendering moral and just citizens, should also include activities that cultivate creative confident and appreciative minds in order to increase the programs’ transformational capacities.

#### **6.2.2.2. Fostering a creative confident mindset**

Some work has been done to create experiences that foster creative confident mindsets such as that which Kelley and Kelley adopt in their classes and workshops. Through resolving quick design challenges and having small successes, people experiment, learn from failed experiences, and iterate their designs to develop true innovations and increase creative confidence (Kelley and Kelley 43, 130, 145-146). Furthermore, a non-judgmental atmosphere is created where failure is permitted, ideas are voiced, strengths are nurtured and potentials are sought, thereby stimulating action (Kelley and Kelley 49, 183, 201). Reisner contends that when an individual is at the action phase, a new identity and attitude begin to emerge; the person becomes more conscious, confident, autonomous, and builds competences (19).

Creative confidence enables people to see and implement alternatives to the world. The Kelley brothers remark that a: “Creative mindset can be a powerful force for looking beyond the status quo” (18). Furthermore, creative confidence does not only allow people to

see alternatives, it also empowers them to implement those alternatives. People with creative confidence are able to find solutions to seemingly insurmountable problems, they collaborate with others to improve the situation around them, and most importantly, they believe they have the capacity to create positive change and courageously take action (Kelley and Kelley 40, 64). What we think and believe influences who we are and how we experience life (McFague 98). Likewise, believing in the possibility of change is the start of social change (Bornstein). According to Kelley and Kelley, “People with creative confidence write the scripts of their own lives, and in doing so, they have greater impact on the world around them” (115). Creative confidence allows them to make their dent in the universe (Kelley and Kelly 34). The best is that anyone can adopt a “can-do” creative mindset to the challenges before them (Kelley and Kelley 64).

This seems to be exactly what people like Hereiti need. Creative confidence could provide them with the required skills, confidence, strength, and courage to deal more effectively with external pressures and challenges that impede action – challenges such as fear of failure, of judgment, of getting started, and of the unknown. Ultimately, it can enable them to counter the status quo, as well as envision and implement just and sustainable lifestyles consistent with their values and principles. Incorporating activities that foster creative confident mindsets increases the capacity of transformational tourism to nurture inner transformation and engender moral and just citizens who seek a sustainable world.

#### **6.2.2.3. Fostering an appreciative mindset**

Nurturing the power that resides in people to envision and implement alternative lifestyles and futures can also be cultivated through the Appreciative Inquiry approach. Appreciative Inquiry takes participants through a four-cycle phase – discover, dream, design and deliver (Murphy et al. 212). The discover phase helps participants think about the best of “what is”; for example, what is good in the world, in my society, in my community; what are my strengths, the strengths of others. The second phase spurs participants to build on those

positive factors and to imagine “what could be”, regardless of time, funding and other limitations. Participants would, for example, be asked to respond to the statement: “In a world where we do not have to worry about money, time, and other limitations, how do you see yourself contributing to a more sustainable and just world?” This phase fosters the exploration of potential new futures, roles, and actions. In the design phase strengths are consolidated and achievable aspirations are identified. A design is made of “what should be”. Finally, the deliver phase provides the opportunity to commit to “what will be”. Strategies are identified to achieve chosen aspirations (Murphy et al. 212). Likewise, the Appreciative Inquiry approach provides people the possibility to explore new roles and actions, plan a course of action, and acquire knowledge and skills to implement the plan – fulfilling the additional steps of the transformation process (Mezirow “Understanding” 224).

Furthermore, various studies highlight the potentials of Appreciative Inquiry to further empower participants to become moral and just citizens as well as change agents. Appreciative Inquiry can foster consciousness, enthusiasm, commitment, creativity, self-confidence, respect for others, energy, strength, and necessary skills, such as problem-solving and leadership skills, to implement envisioned plans and contribute to positive change (Cooperrider and Avital xvi, xxiv; Murphy et al. 213). Whitney and Trosten-Bloom further acknowledge that Appreciative Inquiry liberates people’s sense of individual and collective power, which enables them to create, innovate, and positively influence the future (266, 268). Their research demonstrates that communities, which incorporate people with this kind of power, become life-centered. People in these communities care about and work toward being the best they can possibly be, both personally and within their community. The communities are guided by spiritual ideals such as peace, harmony, justice, love, joy, wisdom, and integrity, and the people in these communities take responsibility for constructing the world they inhabit and making it good for generations to come (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 268). Thus, fostering discussion groups where Appreciative Inquiry methodologies are used during

a tourism experience can empower travelers to deal with factors at the root of their inertia and enable them to more effectively progress through the transformation phases, envision a new just and sustainable lifestyle and society, and find ways to reach that vision.

To conclude, the analyses of Mezirow's transformative learning theory enable us to recognize that various experiential elements should be included in tourism programs – aimed at engendering moral and just citizens – to increase their transformational capacities. These elements should be nature-based, simple living, spiritual, cultural and volunteer activities as well as opportunities to encounter communities that are creating ways of life that are more sustainable and just in order to cultivate disorienting dilemmas and critical reflection. Furthermore, tourism projects should provide rational discourse opportunities, and incorporate competence-, confidence-, strength- and courage-building activities, such as creative confidence and Appreciative Inquiry workshops. Likewise, tourism developers can increase the capacity of tourism programs to facilitate travelers' transition through the transformation process and enable them to deal with factors at the root of their inertia. Travelers will be better prepared for their return home, as they will be empowered to try out new roles and renegotiate relationships based on their new, more humane, more environmental-friendly, morally conscious, and critically aware frames of reference. This is required to arrive at the final stage of the transformation process, namely fully incorporating new attitudes, beliefs and behaviors in accordance with new worldviews, and being competent and self-confident in new roles and relationships (see table 1) (Mezirow, "Understanding" 225). As tourism developers integrate above-mentioned activities in the experience offered, the possibility will exist that travelers achieve inner transformation and have all the necessary tools to become competent and self-confident, just and moral citizens. In addition, as participants potentially implement changes in their lives to live more according to their new worldviews, they will add to the pool of individuals who already contribute to the development of a just and sustainable world. By intensifying the movement

of people guided by common and shared values, who implement changes at various levels in society, societal change will be fostered, since networks of those people will gain the capacity to move mountains and change the world (Logan; Moe-Lobeda 275). A framework of this theory can be found in the appendix.

### **7. Challenges to consider when developing transformational tourism experiences**

Tourism developers willing to create transformational tourism experiences will have to incorporate the various experiential elements this thesis proposes to increase the capacity of tourism to foster inner transformation and contribute to the growing movement of just and moral citizens. Along with these experiential elements, they will also have to take certain challenges into account and respond to them. I present some of those challenges below.

First of all, it is important to make sure to attract tourists who are open to the transformation process; who are willing to have their perspectives moved, look to alternative futures, and implement changes in their lives. Reisner remarks that transformation does “not only depend on places but also on the tourists themselves and their motivations” (30). Clear marketing about the type of tourism offered could help to attract the right participants.

Secondly, to make sure that travelers and local actors providing the various activities adopt the right mentality, it would be useful to develop a code of conduct. This code of conduct could for example, encourage participants to openly listen to various perspectives and be moved by them, even if they initially contradict their own perspectives. This could avoid conflicts and increase the chances of an effective transformational experience.

Thirdly, the transformation process will need to continue on the return home. In order to finalize the transformation, people need to build competence and self-confidence in their new roles and relationships and fully incorporate new attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors as dictated by their new transformed worldviews (Mezirow “Understanding” 225). While the proposed transformational travel experience will prepare travelers for this, applying what they will have learned in their home environment will be challenging. Communities of



support will be important to help participants deal with encountered challenges, since as part of a community with shared values and beliefs we are better able to implement changes in our lives and in society at large (Logan; Moe-Lobeda 275; Focus group). Furthermore, Hereiti shared that meetings, conversations, and workshops should happen on a regular basis; so ongoing support is needed. Otherwise, acquired confidence, courage, strength, and new perspectives could recede over time (Hopuare). Providing online community support and a list of communities – such as social movements and grassroots organizations – located close by the travelers’ home-place could provide participants with continued support to effectively complete the transformation process.

Fourth, it is important to also acknowledge that feelings of guilt, powerlessness, and other unpleasant emotions might emerge among participants. This is often a normal consequence of the disorienting dilemma experienced (Reisner 19). It will be the task of the person responsible for the experience to move participants from negative emotions to emotions of hope and a “we can” attitude. The experiential elements this thesis recommends for implementation in a transformational tourism project will help with this challenge.

Fifth, an aspect to consider is the amount of time a transformational tourism experience should last. Literature research does not help to illuminate how long this period should be. The time a person requires to move through the transformation process varies. This is a challenge to consider. Additional research will be needed to comprehend what the minimum amount of time should be.

Sixth and finally, the reality is that not everyone will come back transformed. People follow different rhythms to complete the various stages of the transformation process. Nevertheless, this experience will not be a waste of time. Sabrina, head of the social movement Colibris Tahiti, told me in our interview that such experiences plant seeds; these seeds will grow over time as people face life experiences that remind them of the transformational travel experience and enable them to better comprehend the messages

shared during this experience. The accumulation of various experiences and understandings will eventually enable them to complete phases of the transformation process (Lebon).

Furthermore, as Assadourian also acknowledges, “the more seeds sown by cultural pioneers now, the higher the probability that the political, social, and cultural vacuum created by the decline of consumerism will be filled with ideas of sustainability” (19). Implementing transformational tourism experiences will not be work in vain.

Additional challenges to consider might emerge as more and more transformational travel experiences are implemented and as evaluation results about the effectiveness of such programs enable us to increase our knowledge about this particular tourism type. In the meantime, the above challenges are useful to consider for tourism developers wishing to create transformational travel experiences.

### **8. Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research**

The greatest limitation of this study lies in its lack of empirical evidence to sustain and verify the effectiveness of the proposed transformational tourism concept. It is a theoretically founded solution that requires additional research. The focus of this thesis shifted various times, from empowering the local French Polynesian community through tourism, to developing sustainable tourism guidelines for the tourism industry in French Polynesia, to the current focus. From the initial fifteen interviews conducted, I ended up using relevant sections of only eight interviews. Ultimately, time and access hindered further qualitative research on the capacity of transformational tourism to engender moral and just citizens. To better comprehend the effectiveness of the transformational tourism concept proposed and strengthen the concept, it will be interesting to a) develop a pilot project, which incorporates the various experiential elements recommended in this thesis, b) evaluate the project to verify the proposed theory’s effectiveness to foster inner transformation and engender moral and just citizens that strive for a sustainable world, and c) make suggestions for necessary modifications of the theory.

Furthermore, Mezirow's theory has been criticized for disregarding socio-cultural, education, socio-economic, gender, and other variables that might influence transformative learning (Reisner 23). Due to a lack of time and access this thesis could not examine if those variables negatively correlate with the transformation process. Therefore, this thesis is also limited in its ability to confirm that the proposed solution will be effective for all types of people, coming from various backgrounds. Subsequent research on this will be needed, which could also be conducted through the pilot project.

Nevertheless, Mezirow's transformative learning theory has been proved to be robust and continues to be used across many disciplines. Equally, the creative confidence and Appreciative Inquiry approaches have proven efficient. Therefore, the theoretical solution recommended in this thesis proposes a promising future for the tourism sector and its contribution to a more just and sustainable world.

Finally, this thesis focused primarily on travelers and how transformational tourism could positively affect travelers to engender moral and just citizens. Further research will be needed to understand how this tourism concept will affect the local community and how it could best be implemented to benefit locals and enable them to grow from this tourism experience as well. By participating in the tourism concept, such as through providing services and certain experiential elements, locals could also receive the opportunity to learn from the experience and interactions with travelers, grow, and find confidence, courage, and strength in their turn to work towards a sustainable world. This is a topic for further research.

## **9. Conclusion**

The world is facing many social and environmental challenges. As the French Polynesian case study demonstrates, our current capitalist consumeristic society, which fails to work within an ethical context and within Earth's limitations, creates social and environmental injustices that lead to these challenges. In the process, the system influences its citizens to follow the status quo. So does the fallen nature of mankind or people's lack of critical

awareness, moral consciousness, confidence, competence, strength, and courage, cause people to perpetuate the injustices. Sadly, this perpetuation is bringing us closer to the tipping points where ecological and social systems unravel irreparably, leading us to a troubling future. Even though many from around the world and from all walks of life are coming together, impelled to create a more just and sustainable world, I recognize that the vast majority does not strive for any change. There is a need to strengthen this hopeful movement of people who, as Macy states, “hear the call to widen the notions of their self-interest and act for the sake of life on Earth” (Macy). By intensifying the movement of people, guided by common and shared values, who implement changes at various levels in society, people will gain the capacity to move mountains and change the world (Logan; Moe-Lobeda 275).

This thesis laid the groundwork of an alternative tourism model that could increase the capacity of tourism to contribute to the development of moral and just citizens by fostering inner transformation. When a tourism program includes disorienting dilemma experiences, opportunities for rational discourse, and creative confidence and Appreciative Inquiry activities, the program aids travelers to critically reflect on personal and structural sin as well as their self-location in relation with the rest of the world, which enables them to acquire more social and environmental responsible worldviews, away from sin. It also fosters among travelers competence, strength, courage, and confidence to live according to those new worldviews, moving them in the process towards healthier relationships with God, the self, the other, and the natural world. Likewise, the tourism experience could enable its travelers to complete the initial stages of the transformation process (as explained by Mezirow), be well-prepared to accomplish the final stages of the transformation process on their return home, and deal with the factors underlying their inertia. The capacity of travelers to reach inner transformation – to fully incorporate new attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors as dictated by their new critically aware and socially and environmentally responsible perspectives and to become competent and self-confident in their new roles and relationships

– could be increased through the proposed transformational tourism experience. Travel experiences incorporating suggested elements, along with a continued community support back home, could likewise empower travelers to become just and moral citizens who strive for a sustainable and harmonious world. Nevertheless, further research on this transformational tourism concept will be needed to improve existing knowledge and increase the effectiveness of this concept to contribute to the global social movement and to societal transformation.

This thesis contributes to the literature in various ways. First of all, my case study about French Polynesia sheds light about the role the current capitalist consumeristic society plays in the social and environmental challenges French Polynesia faces and how it unravels healthy relationships, leading the country to an unstable future. Secondly, by analyzing Mezirow's theory – along with the factors that underlie people's inaction – I developed knowledge about which kind of activities tourism programs should incorporate to facilitate travelers' transition through the transformation process and empower them to deal with factors at the root of their inaction. Likewise, instead of demonstrating that tourism has certain transformational capacities, as other authors have done, I explain how those capacities could be increased and directed towards effectively enabling travelers to become moral and just citizens who strive for a more harmonious and sustainable world. By doing this, I also present how tourism could indirectly contribute to societal transformation and the development of a brighter future. Reisner contends that more studies should be conducted to understand the relationships between transformational tourism, human development, sustainability and existence (228). This thesis unraveled how positive relationships between those elements could be fostered.

The purpose of this thesis is to inspire current and future tourism developers to develop transformational tourism experiences and to dig deeper into the potentials of tourism to contribute to a brighter future. However, envisioning and implementing alternatives should

not be limited to the tourism sector, but extend to other fields and our ways of living in general. May this thesis inspire you to contribute in your way. May it trigger some ideas, some critical reflection and personal questioning, and even a desire to embark on your inner transformational journey to unleash your potentials to contribute to a sustainable and just future. Let us strive for a brighter future together. Through our collective actions, and the actions of millions among us, each unique in their own fashion, we will be able to achieve positive change.

Appendix

Theoretical framework

1) There is an urgent need to foster a more just and sustainable world, where our societal system functions within an ethical context and within Earth’s limitations, in order to avoid the troubling future towards which we are marching.

2) To reach this societal transformation more moral and just citizens are needed who pursue a harmonious and sustainable world to foster societal transformation from the bottom-up.

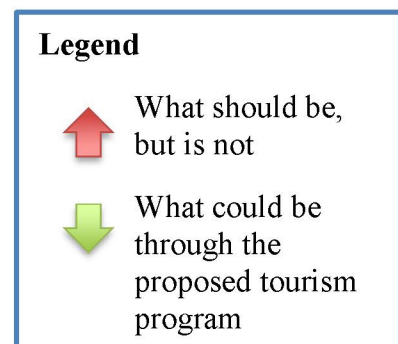
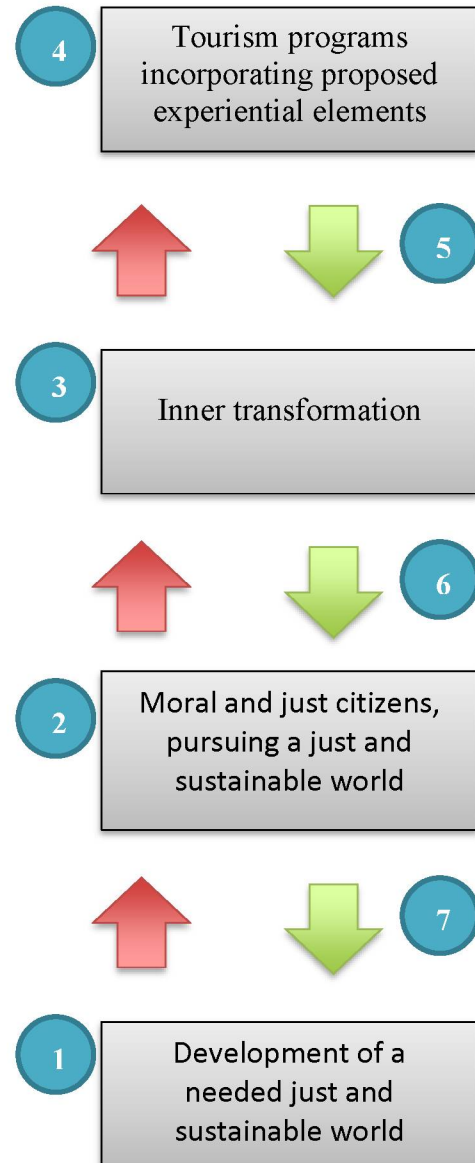
3) Since certain factors impede the majority of the population to become those citizens, inner transformation should be fostered which will enable them to restore their broken relationships with God, the self, the other and the environment, repent from sin, and gain critical awareness, moral consciousness, competence, confidence, strength, and courage. Likewise, factors at the root of people’s inaction will be tackled.

4) This thesis aims to find out how tourism can contribute to the creation of a needed just and sustainable world. Fostering inner transformation among travelers gives tourism the potential to contribute to a brighter future. To effectively cultivate inner transformation, tourism programs should incorporate the experiential elements proposed in this thesis.

5) Likewise, tourism programs enable travelers to complete the initial stages of the transformation process and be well-prepared to accomplish the final stages on their return home. The capacity of travelers to reach inner transformation is increased through the proposed transformational tourism experience.

6) As travelers will reach inner transformation they will be able to deal with factors at the root of their inaction and fully incorporate new attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors as dictated by their new critically aware and socially and environmentally responsible perspectives. Consequently, they will be empowered to become moral and just citizens who pursue a harmonious and sustainable world.

7) Tourism can likewise intensify the movement of those pursuing a just and sustainable world. A mass of people, guided by common and shared values, who implement changes at various levels in society, will gain the capacity to move mountains and develop this needed world.



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