License to chill (the planet): an integrated green tourist school program.

What is it about?

As tourism grows, so too does its environmental impact (Ehigiamusoe, 2020). In light of tourism's growing presence in our future, it is necessary to address these costs without diminishing its significant economic benefit (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019). Children are a grossly underrepresented group in tourism research (Poria & Timothy, 2014), which is problematic considering they not only contribute to tourism's environmental impact but will inherit the planet that we are creating without their inclusion. For this reason, it is proposed to include children in building a sustainable future in tourism, through an integrated green tourist program in schools. This program begins with education about green tourist behaviours and culminates in a green tourist license (see *Figure 1*). This license serves not only as an achievement to display competency, but also a commitment to a future of being a green tourist. The current essay will briefly discuss the importance of tourism's impact on the environment, the premises of why children's inclusion is powerful, the proposal of the green tourist program and finally future directions.
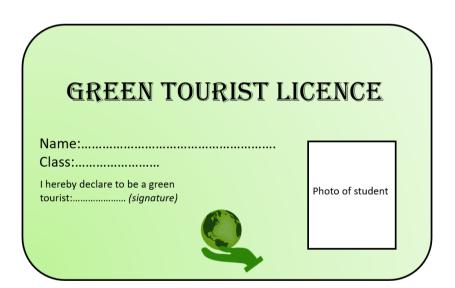

Figure 1. Green tourist licence.

Why is it important?

Tourism is the most accessible it has ever been, as reflected by its growth outstripping GDP for eight consecutive years up to 2018 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019). While this is beneficial for economies both locally and globally (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019), it has profound impact on the environment, which is only predicted to

increase with tourism's growth. Tourism already contributes up to 8% of CO_2 globally (Lenzen et al., 2018), and it is predicted that between 2010 and 2050 tourism's use of water will grow by 92% and land use by 189% (Gössling and Peeters, 2015). One avenue in the pursuit of sustainable tourism is changing consumer behaviour. Behavioural interventions cost much less than changing surrounding infrastructure and can be incredibly effective at inducing behaviour change (Glanz & Bishop, 2010). Taking a closer look at consumer behaviour, it is evident that some groups contribute more to unsustainable practices in tourism than others. Family tourism is one group which significantly contributes, for example, children are one leading cause of food waste in hotel buffets (Juvan, Grün & Dolnicar, 2018). This is important, given that families are a growing group within tourism (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015). Despite this, children have been grossly underrepresented in tourism studies (Poria & Timothy, 2014). Given that it is children who will inherit the earth and who have significant ability to reduce their negative impact, it seems counterproductive to not give them an active role in building their own future.

What are the premises?

Clearly, there is a significant gap of children's role in sustainable tourism in the literature. Beyond addressing this gap, there are theoretical reasons why children are invaluable in the pursuit of a sustainable future. Habit formation is much easier to build in children, due to their plasticity of habits not being firmly set, and habits formed in childhood being likely to track into adulthood (Habeat Consortium, 2017). Because habits become entrenched with repetition and therefore become resistant to change, the earlier that habits are established, the more likely they are to persist (Lally et al., 2010). By creating environmentally friendly habits in children, there is a huge output of behaviour across their lifetime, in comparison to the effort of building or modifying them in adults which is effortful and often unsuccessful (Duhigg, 2014).

While habits have a direct effect on the habitual behaviour itself, there are also indirect effects. Cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) is one mechanism which causes indirect effect and arises from consistent behaviours such as habits. Cognitive dissonance refers to the discomfort caused by misaligned actions and/or beliefs (Festinger, 1957). The result of this is that people attempt to avoid this discomfort by keeping their behaviours and/or beliefs consistent (Festinger, 1957; Fisher & Purcal, 2017). For example, someone who always recycles may feel discomfort about wasting water, because these actions are

inconsistent with one another – one is environmentally friendly, and one is not. In the case of habits, which are difficult to break, it is often easier to adjust your surrounding behaviours to be consistent with your habit (Lally et al., 2010), rather than adjust your habit to be consistent with surrounding behaviour. Children as young as preschool age have developed the ability for cognitive dissonance and change their behaviours and beliefs as a result (Egan et al., 2007).

Commitment also creates profound effect on behaviour through cognitive dissonance (Lokhorse et al., 2013). Through having people commit to a goal or task, the belief of their commitment sets a precedent for future behaviour; to align with this belief, behaviour is adjusted to avoid the discomfort of inconsistency. Evidence shows that, when people commit to a task, their behaviour changes substantially both short-term (within the commitment period) and long-term (beyond commitment period); also outperforming many other forms of intervention (Lokhorse et al., 2013).

Ultimately, habit and commitment are two powerful forces on behaviour. Both can create cognitive dissonance leading to changes to targeted and surrounding behaviours. Considering cognitive dissonance develops in childhood and habits can persist throughout a lifetime, this suggests the opportunity to create long lasting behaviour change in children, which will greatly benefit a future of sustainable tourism.

How can these challenges be addressed?

It is evident that children have a huge capacity to play a valuable role in developing the sustainable future of tourism. The proposed way to utilise this is to integrate sustainable tourism into schools. The infrastructure already exists to teach children effectively and even test them on their knowledge. Along with English, Math and History, a cornerstone of the learning experience can be sustainable tourism. Much like children obtain a pen license, it is suggested that young children first learn all the behaviours they need to be a sustainable tourist, and when they display competency, they will receive their "Green Vacation License", both as an accomplishment and commitment to the future (see *Figure 1*).
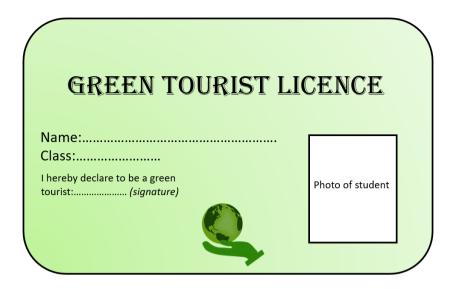
Figure 1. Green tourist license.

This will be framed in a fun, interactive delivery to increase engagement (Granic et al,. 2014) and give students an opportunity to practice their green tourist behaviours without needing to travel. Students will pass through online modules relating to various types of green behaviour, earning badges for each module they complete. For example, a water droplet badge when they complete water conservation, a lightbulb when they learn how to conserve electricity. The final test to obtain their green traveller license will be a school vacation (such as a school camp), which many schools already go on and where teachers are able to keep track of behaviours. To take it one-step further, the school camp locations can be fitted out to track behaviours that are not easily observed, such as water meters for shower and tap usage. After passing this mock vacation and obtaining their green vacation licence, the progression of green tourist education would persist throughout school. Students will learn more in depth about the impact of tourism, such as the science behind global warming and the sociological costs of cultural dilution. Considering the effects of repetition on habit, it is predicted that these behaviours will become deeply ingrained by adulthood and an environmental sensitivity will persist long beyond school years. The commitment of the green tourist license is expected to have significant short and long-term effects, which are aimed to spillover beyond the tourism context, to places like home and future workplaces. The ability for children to have influence across many contexts and decades renders this solution to tourism's sustainable future one with profound impact, by utilising relevant theory and existing infrastructure in schools.

What remains to be seen?

Regardless of the specific approach proposed, it is clear that children are grossly underrepresented in tourism and sustainability research. Not only this, but they have significant power to make a change. The current proposal is one avenue towards a fresh outlook on tourism's future, but the core of the argument can be translated into innumerable applications. Children will inherit the earth and contribute to environmental impact, yet they are not active agents in creating the world they will inherit. It begs the question, where can children be given the power to help shape their own world? It is clear from the current essay, that any societal issue which requires behaviour and attitude change, is one that children can have a hand in creating. Particularly issues as pressing as environmental preservation are ones that children should be included in, because they have significant power to make a difference to their very future.

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