# The Doughnut Destination: applying Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economy perspective to rethink tourism destination management

Stefan Hartman and Jasper Hessel Heslinga

## Abstract

**Purpose** – *In this viewpoint paper, the authors explore and discuss how Kate Raworth's (2017) Doughnut Economy perspective and accompanying "Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist" can be applied to rethink the future of tourism destination management for the better.*

**Design/methodology/approach** – *The authors take a "transferability" approach, being a process performed by the authors as readers of existing work noting its specifics in order to compare them to the specifics of an environment with which they are familiar. In this viewpoint paper, the authors apply the work of Raworth to the environment of tourism destination development.*

**Findings** – *The Doughnut Economy perspective and the accompanying "seven ways" help forward tourism destination management in the future, even more when it is interpreted and tailored to a tourism context and reconceptualized as the Doughnut Destination as presented in this paper.*

**Originality/value** – *The work of Kate Raworth has been gaining interest and support throughout academia, society and in various (economic) policy domains. Surprisingly, it has not been applied to the tourism context to its full extent, even though it offers much potential in recent discussions on overtourism, carrying capacity and limits of acceptable change as well as offering a possible framework to structure monitoring effects in the pursuit of developing smart tourism destinations.*

**Keywords** *Tourism management, Destination development, Governance, Resilient destinations*

**Paper type** *Viewpoint*

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## 1. Introduction

In 2017, Kate Raworth published the influential book *"Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist"*. In this book, she proposes a visual framework for sustainable development – shaped like a doughnut or lifebelt – combining the concept of planetary boundaries with the complementary concept of social boundaries (Raworth, 2017). She elaborates seven ways to rethink economic development. Surprisingly, this innovative way of thinking has not been applied yet in a tourism context; hence, we think the approach has great potential for improving future tourism destination management. First, it advocates a welcome paradigm shift that resonates well with current lines of thinking in tourism, which need to be connected further, e.g. related to regenerative tourism, resilience, transitions thinking, purpose economy and carrying capacity. Second, it offers an overarching perspective seeking wider system transformation, which we believe is crucial, as well as still underdeveloped in tourism studies, to counter the still quite dominant growth-oriented, boosterism-inspired ways of developing tourism destinations (Hartman, 2022).

In this viewpoint paper, we build upon the work of Raworth and introduce *The Doughnut Destination* as an alternative perspective to examine tourism destinations and better manage them. After introducing the approach itself, by focusing on the model, we apply Raworth's ideas by transferring the "seven ways" she identified into the realm of tourism to propose seven ways of

framing tourism destinations. We use a "transferability" approach, being a process performed by the authors as readers of existing work, in our case the work of Raworth, noting its specifics in order to compare them to the specifics of an environment with which they are familiar, in our case tourism destination development. The work of Raworth inspires new ways of looking at tourism, leading to conclusions on the transferability of the concept and its value/power to rethink the future of tourism destination management.

## 2. The Doughnut Destination

The seeming simplicity of the "doughnut model" makes it both attractive and effective (see Figure 1). It summarizes a complex storyline in a set of basic items. The basic model shows a "safe space" when the social foundation is not jeopardized (if so: shortfall), and the ecological ceiling is considered (if so: overshoot). The model shows thresholds between light green and dark green which, if crossed, mean economies enter a danger zone. When the outer limits, between the dark green and the white space inside and outside of the model, are crossed, it means economies are out of balance.

Transferring the model to a tourism context, we find that social, environmental, economic and technical overshoots are widely identified, e.g. related to overtourism, social uprising, displacement, $CO_2$ emissions, ecosystem degradation and depletion of resources (energy, water and food). More examples are given in Figure 2. Shortfalls can be related to bankruptcies, poverty, unemployment, poor working conditions, degradation of infrastructures, inaccessibility and low visitor satisfaction (also see Figure 2). Understanding overshoots and shortfalls can help to identify upper and lower limits as well as thresholds, which subsequently can be monitored and function as early warning signals (thresholds) and emergency signals (limits) for stakeholders in tourism management. When thresholds are reached, or worse, limits are exceeded, a destination has been pushed out of balance, and immediate action is needed. To stay within the "safe space", as shown in green in Figure 2, destinations need to find a balance between the quality of work for entrepreneurs and employees, the quality of experience for visitors, the quality of life for inhabitants and the quality of the place (public space, heritage and ecosystems) while avoiding overshoot and shortfalls (cf. Koens et al., 2019; CELTH, 2022). The transfer of Raworth's model to a tourism context draws attention to what we call the Doughnut Destination (Figure 2) and allows us to raise awareness about what it takes to implement a Doughnut Destination in practice. This is discussed in the following section making use of Raworth's "seven ways".
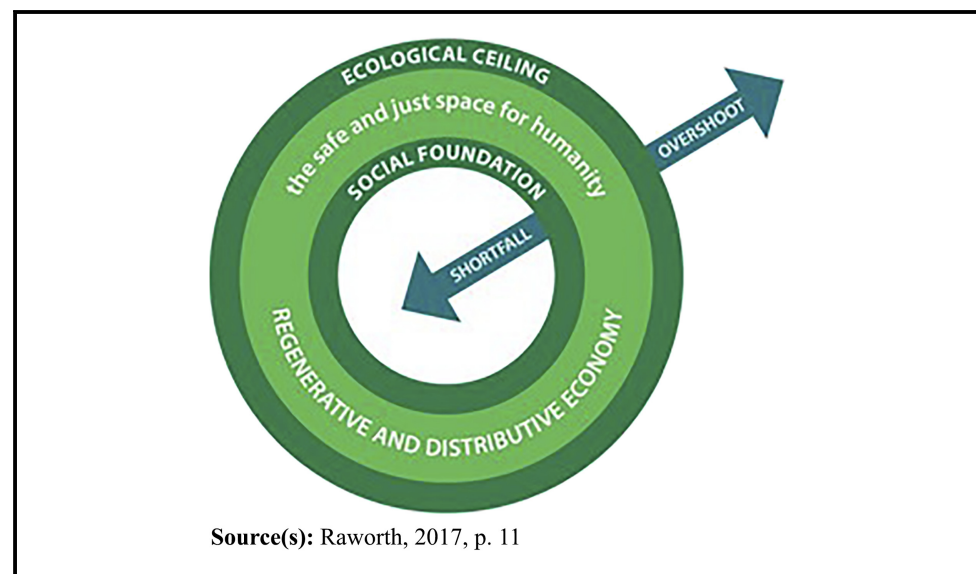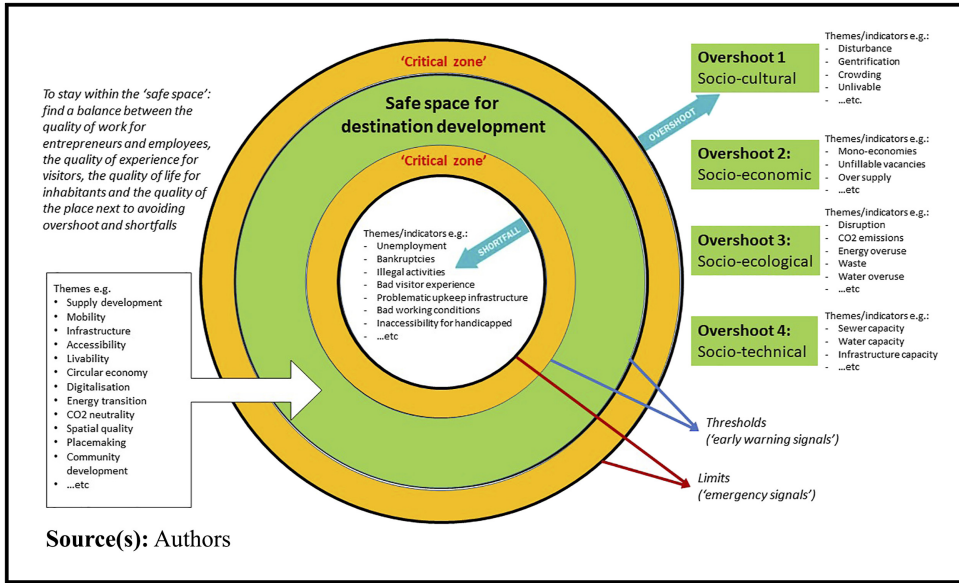
| **Figure 1** | Doughnut model |
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**Source(s):** Raworth, 2017, p. 11

**Figure 2** The Doughnut Destination



**Source(s):** Authors

## 3. Seven ways of reframing tourism destinations

In her book, Raworth identified seven ways to think like a 21st century economist, by criticizing the old principles of economic thinking and introducing a set of new principles that should be guiding in the future. We transfer these same principles into a tourism context and support this by examples observed from practice.

### 3.1 Change the goal: tourism as a means

Similar to the observation of "over 70 years economics has been fixated on GDP, or national output, as its primary measure of progress" by Raworth (p. 28), tourism scholars Cave and Dredge (2020, p. 505) note that in a tourism context, "seven decades of growth have thwarted any appetite to imagine new and alternative economic models". However, they also state that there are emerging shifts in thinking focusing on "how to thrive in balance" (p. 28). For example, the Netherlands Board of Tourism and Conventions (NBTC), being the Dutch National Tourism Organization (NTO) as well as the city of Amsterdam, publicly announced that tourism should become a means for development instead of solely being a goal in itself (NBTC, 2019; City of Amsterdam, 2021).

### 3.2 See the big picture: tourism is embedded into a larger whole

Tourism is not a stand-alone industry. It is intrinsically connected to and/or part of wider regions (cities, rural areas and remote areas) and their communities, landscapes and ecosystems (Heslinga et al., 2017; Hartman, 2021a; Postma and Yeoman, 2021). What is more, tourism's success often depends on these connections. The tourism industry should appreciate these connections, value and respect them, and seek to make such connections mutually beneficial (also see principle 6 on regenerative and responsible tourism). Stakeholders involved in tourism, including the public sector, should develop the competencies to address tourism as such.

### 3.3 Nurture human nature: tourists are not rational economic men

Many tourists are tempted to seek the best deal in price/quality ratio. Yet the price is not always the core aspect as emotions play a big role as well. People seek experiences, transformations

and may also seek ways to reduce impact, travel sustainably and give back to local communities, businesses and ecosystems all as part of fulfilling their needs. Tourists can do good, many want to do good but may not know how to do so. The industry is generally not fully helpful here, or worse, not even interested as it might complicate matters and affect their business models.

### 3.4 Get savvy with systems: tourism is part of a dynamic complex system

Various authors argue the relevance of adopting a systems perspective on destination development (Hartman, 2021b; Postma and Yeoman, 2021; Ma and Hassink, 2013; Baggio, 2008). Understanding the tourism industry, a tourism business or a destination as a complex system helps to understand how their development is affected by external forces that drive change within systems, trigger adaptation by change agents within systems and potentially create new emergent structures along the way when their adaptive actions gain momentum and become widespread – often in a self-organizing manner. Also, adopting a complex systems approach implies that no single actor is in complete control. Systems will always be dynamic, they even have to be, for agents to adapt and systems to co-evolve in relation to other (also dynamic) systems. We have to see tourism as part of wider systems (e.g. city or region) and not try to address it on its own, making a case for a focus on resilient regions (Heslinga *et al.*, 2020; Heslinga, 2022).

### 3.5 Tourism needs to be redistributive: tourism benefits all

In tourism, the idea of growth will eventually be abandoned and slowly substituted by the idea that tourism needs to become a means for community development wherein all stakeholders benefit (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). In the Netherlands, the aim of "tourism benefits all" has made its way into Perspective 2030, a future vision of the NBTC, the Dutch NTO and also to more regional tourism policy documents, such as in the Gastvrij Fryslan 2028 [Hospitality Friesland 2028] vision by the Province of Friesland, The Netherlands or the 2025 vision "Rethinking the Visitor Economy" by Amsterdam & Partners, the destination marketing organization (DMO) of the City of Amsterdam. These are examples of frontrunners that are trying to flip the perspective from a focus on the industry and economic gains to societal benefits and include the voices of local communities, stimulate place making, involve local small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and support local or regional supply and value chains.

### 3.6 Create to regenerate: tourism needs to be regenerative

Whereas understanding of responsible tourism, referring to a type of tourism "that creates better places for people to live in, and better places to visit" (City of Cape Town, 2002), has been around since the 2002 Cape Town Declaration, the term "regenerative tourism" has been gaining increasing attention in recent years, which describes the ideal that tourism leaves a place better than it was before (Cave and Dredge, 2020).

### 3.7 Be agnostic about growth: tourism growth is not endless

The idea that growth is not endless is pertinent for the tourism industry and tourism destination development. However, too many tourists visiting a destination will eventually lead to overtourism, indicating that social and/or environmental thresholds have been reached, and limits are exceeded. Some destinations, for example the city of Amsterdam, have laid down in their local regulations that there is a maximum and minimum number of visitors. Entirely in line with the ideas of Raworth, the city adopted a minimum of 10 million visitors and a maximum of 20 million visitors as emergency signals (limits) and appointed 12 and 18 million visitors as early warning signals (thresholds) (City of Amsterdam, 2021).

## 4. Discussion and conclusions

In this viewpoint paper, we build on the work of Raworth to propose the Doughnut Destination as an alternative way to look at destinations. The perspective fits very well to a tourism context as explained above. The doughnut model provides destinations with a seemingly simple but powerful and relevant guiding narrative, and the "seven ways" offer a set of practical themes to adopt and further contextualize specific destinations. Here, we should be aware of tourism's interrelationship with other sectors or policy domains, implying that applying the model in the regeneration and planning of a destination presents challenges as tourism does not operate in isolation but is in turn dependent on and influenced by other external factors beyond the planner's control. Also, the Doughnut Destination model developed in this paper (see Figure 2) offers a possible framework for monitoring as it can help to support smart tourism destination development and management. By selecting and closely monitoring key performance indicators (KPIs), the destination model can identify when overshoots of shortfalls are within reach and improve future decision-making, making better informed (urgent) decisions to bring the destination back to the safe space. To further develop the explorative work presented in this paper requires empirical work in the form of case study research to analyze applications in practice (e.g. case Amsterdam) or explore the enablers and barriers to implement the perspective of the Doughnut Destination.

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