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Understanding Collaboration and Sustainable Tourism Development

Janne Liburd

Introduction

This chapter will provide conceptual clarifications of collaboration and sustainable development, and their application to tourism. Collaboration is not new in the contexts of tourism research, tourism higher education or the tourism industry. Academic life thrives on selection, classification and informed judgement, which are not at odds with collaboration. Without argument and counterargument, knowledge cannot be advanced. Tourism destinations are made up of many industry actors and stakeholders who are engaged in a myriad of networks and collaborative efforts. Tourists readily choose between destinations in a globally competitive field. Many travel to over-crowded destinations, where the tourism sector drives the destination to accommodate its demands, which may be at odds with sustainably living within the needs and wants of the destination and its local inhabitants. This chapter will attempt to overcome the all too frequent gap between sustainability in tourism theory and practice, by focusing on collaborative dimensions and possible critical engagements. The overall objective is to add three aspects to the current literature and appreciative understanding of the importance of collaboration for sustainable tourism development.

First, it is of pivotal importance to emphasise that collaboration distinguishes itself from cooperation and other forms of coordination. Collaboration does not imply a division of labour, which is often the essence of cooperation. It rests on the hypothesis that the sum of the work is more than its individual parts (Huxham, 1993; Liburd, 2013). The concept of collaboration suggests that the creation of joint outcomes could not be engendered by a single organisation or individual. Collaboration is not a neutral undertaking. It implicates interests and power, which are easily diluted in the abbreviated use of co-operation, co-creation, co-ordination, etc.

Second, I advance conceptual understandings of sustainable tourism development in order to embrace dynamics, complexity and the human dimension in the sustainable development of tourism. It is humans who care for the sustainable development of tourism – or not.

Third, by reflecting on the present dimensions of collaborative engagement and sustainable tourism development, I will question whether sustainable tourism development is sufficient, and if ethics can help to advance understandings of how caring that lies beyond selfish concerns can be used to identify latent opportunities for stewardship. The UN *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* recognizes the shortcomings of sustainable accomplishments for people, planet, peace and prosperity. As tourism is accentuated in three of the seventeen UN Sustainable Development Goals, I will also argue that collaboration – not just partnerships – should be seen as a central tenet for resilient action. The fact is that we consume and destroy natural resources at an unprecedented rate, with material and environmental impacts that will outlive us by tens or hundreds of thousand years. Impacts that are met with policy exercises and planning horizons of only three to five years. This represents not only a futile exercise by regional and national governments, but also an urgent call for system transformation where civic society, businesses and governments collaborate beyond selfish gains and build resilience across a range of scales (Morton, 2010; Schellhorn, 2010; Liburd, 2013; Higham & Miller, 2017).

Conceptualising collaboration

Conceptual research is generally concerned with typologies, definitions, past and current usage, discourse, deconstruction, and synthesis of concepts, which need not mobilise direct, empirical evidence (Xin, Tribe & Chambers, 2013). In the following, I will provide definitions and syntheses, which are complemented by empirical evidence of collaboration that have been gleaned from collaborative dimensions of tourism education and research. This is to ensure that the concept and importance of collaboration does not sit as a castles-in-the-air proposition. Empirical grounding will serve to ambitiously engage tourism's possibilities and responsibilities as a global phenomenon in the joint creation of better futures.

In the most basic terms, collaboration can be said to take place when two or more parties join forces to achieve a shared objective, whether the parties are individuals, groups, businesses, institutions or nations. Originating from the Latin word *collaborare*, meaning to work together, the concept of collaboration appears uncomplicated. Mattessich, Murray-Close and Monsey (2001) define collaboration as a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organisations to achieve common goals. Since the Second

World War, collaboration has nevertheless carried highly negative connotations. During World War II, collaborators were those who worked with the enemy. Offering goods and services for ideological and non-ideological pursuits, some of the worst crimes and atrocities against humanity, including the Holocaust, were assisted by collaborators. In linguistic terms, collaboration implies more or less equal partners working together, which is clearly not the case when one party is an army of occupation. The positive form of working together for some form of mutual benefit will be pursued in the following, where the concept of collaboration suggests the joint effort of individuals to achieve a common objective, whether in institutions, organisations, businesses, with the state or other nations.

Collaboration often increases boundaries of knowledge (Anandarajan & Anandarajan, 2010), which is particularly evident in research collaboration, where scientific knowledge is advanced through argument and counterargument. In a bibliometric review of research collaboration, Subramanyam (1983) identified the following types: teacher–pupil collaboration, collaboration among colleagues, supervisor–assistant collaboration, researcher–consultant collaboration, collaboration between organisations, and international collaboration. These types of collaboration seem to overlap, and can be summarized in five dimensions: collaboration within and across the institution, with the state, with industry, across nations, and over time (Liburd, 2013: 57). Collaboration across all five dimensions will be illustrated through practices in tourism education and research.

Tourism attracts academic attention as a phenomenon and by the sheer diversity of subject areas jointly involved in its construction. Disciplines such as economics, geography, anthropology, psychology, sociology and history, among others, have contributed to the development of a dynamic and productive field of higher education and research. I shall refrain from entering into how sustainable tourism development informs teaching and learning in higher education, or how sustainable tourism development education may inform research, as this is compellingly addressed in Chapter 3 (Heape & Liburd, 2018). The development in higher tourism education and research since the 1950s is captured in Figure 2.1, which illustrates the defining characteristics and the relations between stages, research platforms, and the disciplines informing the tourism curriculum.

Jafari's (1989, 1990) four research platforms are based largely on motives as the key rationale by scholars in tourism, hence the classifications as advocacy, cautionary, adaptancy, and knowledge. As noted by Airey (2008: 2), it was not until the "knowledge platform" that a mature state of tourism as a field of study was arrived at by means of gradual, collaborative efforts. The four development