Academic Leadership Praxis in Sustainable Tourism: Lessons from the Past and Bridges to the Future

Stephen Schweinsberg
Helena Heizmann
Simon Darcy
Stephen Wearing
Matija Djolic

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This paper examines the potential contribution of academics working in the sustainable tourism arena from a relational, practice-based leadership perspective. It argues that these leadership perspectives require a shift in thinking from narrowly defined, instrumental measures of academic impact imposed by performance management and the somewhat heroic ideals of leadership. Instead it outlines how everyday practice that directly influences collaborative agency among multiple tourism stakeholders is able to provide a more useful direction. To illustrate this perspective, it engages in retrospective reflection, drawing on a number of pioneers in tourism scholarship. It specifically examines their praxis of dialogue, stewardship and critical reflexivity and the ways in which these may serve to inspire future sustainable tourism education and scholarship.

Introduction

The UNWTO Secretary General described the 2017 United Nations Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development as an opportunity to 'advance the contribution of the tourism sector to the three pillars of sustainability … while also raising the true dimensions of a sector that is often undervalued' (Bramwell, Higham, Lane, & Miller, 2017, p. 4). Wood (2017) has recently argued that sustainability in tourism can only be achieved through a revamping of tourism systems with their associated governance and policy frameworks. Universities, she notes, have an important role to play in such discussions on account of their ability to act as a training ground for the development of critical and reflexive thinking amongst graduates (see also Hales & Jennings, 2017). University graduates are envisaged to be the leaders of global tourism into the future and it is vital that their decision-making frameworks are more 'rigorous and open to a wider set of measures and realities than in the past' (Samuelson, 2006, p. 356 in Sheldon, Fesenmaier, Woeber, Cooper, & Antonioli, 2008, p. 62).

In this paper, we examine the praxis of academic leadership for sustainable tourism. Ferdig (2007, p. 25) has argued that sustainability leadership represents an ideal for 'co-creating a sustainable future' that 'balances among and between simultaneous and sometimes contradictory demands for sustainable solutions (Ferdig, 2007, p. 25). Provocation is at the heart of sustainable leadership (Kurucz,

Colbert, & Marcus, 2014). We must leave those we seek to educate (students, industry, government, community etc.) actively questioning the status quo or what are considered conventional wisdoms, seeking to discern their own meanings and connections (Ham, 2016). The ability of academics to be successful provocateurs is, however, often limited by the increasingly neoliberal nature of tourism education. Tourism is a principal vehicle of capitalist production in many parts of the world (Fletcher, 2011) and it could reasonably be suggested that the growing prevalence of private sector corporate frameworks in tourism and hospitality education represent a refocussing of society's expectations and an unwillingness of society to fund institutions that are dissociated from 'reality'.

While the authors are not unsympathetic to such views, we would seek to argue that as academic leaders we must embrace both the vocational and liberal characteristics of our field. Much as Tribe (2002) once argued with respect to the philosophic practitioner, we are striving to develop graduates and future leaders who can "deliver efficient and effective services while at the same time discharging the role of stewardship for the development of the wider tourism world in which these services are delivered" (p. 338). In doing so, future leaders will hopefully be equipped to view all the human and non-human components of the global tourism industry with respect; and not simply as "disposable cogs in a corporate wheel" (Caton, 2015, p. 52).

Academic leadership practices will thus need to critically expose the multiple value and knowledge systems that intersect to constitute understandings of sustainability. When we understand how our values interplay with those of others in the global tourism system we are better able to make informed decisions regarding what constitutes responsible behaviour and corporate social responsibility, as well as to demonstrate the value of sustainability thinking in tourism for society at large. Sheldon and Fesenmaier (2014) have identified how the Tourism Education Futures Initiative (TEFI) has called for the teaching of values-based education based around the principles of stewardship, mutuality, knowledge, ethics and professionalism. When the leadership lens is applied to such principles, the focus is less on characteristics of the individual leader and more on the processes or practices whereby future leaders co-create with a community of influencers.

In the present paper, we argue that academic leadership in the context of sustainability is best conceived as a *praxis* in which dialogue, stewardship and critical reflexivity constitute particularly important ongoing behaviours that may release the potential for collaborative agency (Raelin, 2016a). From this perspective of leadership, different stakeholders look to coordinate and build on each other's moves, thereby creating the conditions for more sustainable resolutions and outcomes (Raelin, 2016b). In presenting this discussion, the paper is structured as follows. First, leadership-as-practice theory is considered and how existing approaches to academic leadership often fall short in addressing the complex challenges involved in sustainable tourism development. Next, we offer an illustration and discussion of these issues by drawing on a selection of cases of pioneers in tourism scholarship that have variously been considered to embody and foster aspects of this praxis of leadership. The conclusion presents implications

for the (leadership) role of academics in sustainable tourism development into the future.

Leadership-as-practice and sustainable tourism

The idea of leadership-as-practice has been described as a move away from seeing leadership in terms of the 'traits or behaviours of particular individuals and more as a 'cooperative effort among participants who choose through their own rules to achieve a distinctive outcome' (Raelin, 2011, p. 4). With its origins in the work of social theorists like Heidegger and Bourdieu, practice scholarship has come to be applied extensively to the study of business disciplines like strategy (see Carroll, Levy, & Richmond, 2008; Carter, Clegg, & Kornberger, 2008; Whittington, 1996, 2007). In recent years practice-based perspectives have also begun to be applied to the study of leadership (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2008; Carroll et al., 2008; Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2010; Denis, Langley, & Rouleau, 2010; Raelin, 2011, 2016a, 2016b). To date, however, there has been little specific reference to the application of practice-based leadership perspectives to the study of academics and their impact on tourism sustainability debates.

Perspectives on tourism leadership are steeped in the competency agendas of a new managerialism that views leadership through a series of hard metrics, including publication counts, involvement on editorial boards, membership of the Tourism Academy etc. (see Dredge & Schott, 2013; Jamal, Smith, & Watson, 2008; Jamrozy, Backman, & Backman, 1996; Jogaratnam, Chon, McCleary, Mena, & Yoo, 2005; Law, Leung, & Buhalis, 2010; Bob McKercher, 2005; Zhao & Ritchie, 2007). This narrow focus is surprising when one considers the complex systems that pervade much of the literature on sustainability and sustainability leadership (Ferdig, 2007; Metcalf & Benn, 2013). Tourism sustainability represents the archetypal wicked problem for leadership, a problem that is defined not on the basis of its technical complexity but rather on its values-based ambiguity (Hall, Gössling, & Scott, 2015). Solving wicked problems requires that academics acknowledge the state of the world as is, and simultaneously work collaboratively with others to affect practice outcomes (see Camillus, 2008; Churchman, 1967; Lazarus, 2008; Rittel & Webber, 1973).

Tribe (2010) has written that academics develop knowledge in the context of a diverse set of institutional couplings. Perhaps the most universally accepted (and critiqued) of these couplings is the International Academy for the Study of Tourism. Bob McKercher (President of the Academy at the time of writing) has written on the goal of the Academy to 'further the scholarly research and professional investigation of tourism' (B. McKercher, 2017). Within the current list of 76 Fellows and Fellows Emeritus of the Academy there are a range of individuals that have made considerable contributions to the study and practice of tourism. Their success in this regard can clearly be seen in their level of publications, contributions to degree development, teaching reputations, membership of editorial boards etc. However, as Ek and Larson (2017) note, the success of these individuals 'is [also] a consequence of intangible, overlapping, contextual circumstances that together create a complex web constituted by interdependent

practices and performances that are always in the making, situational, and always already relational in time and space' (p. 8).

The present authors suggest that as we strive to understand the role of academic leadership for sustainable tourism in the future, we must seek to learn more from the 'praxis' of those that have navigated the intricate social networks of the tourism space before us. In this sense, members of the tourism academy and other unifying academic bodies may act as mentors for an ever-increasing array of tourism scholars throughout the world, in ways that may not be reduced to narrowly defined performance metrics. In their everyday interactions, they have wrestled with the successes of academic leadership in sustainability debates as well as its perceived failures (see McCool, Butler, Buckley, Weaver, & Wheller, 2015). Thus, we do not look to the past with an agenda to elevate individual academics to a continued position of top down influence. Rather, we wish to examine their praxis of dialogue, stewardship and critical reflexivity to look for lessons that may foster the development of communities of change agents (Raelin 2011) that find ways to relationally and collaboratively advance sustainability issues in tourism.

Lessons from the Past for Understanding Future Leadership Praxis

In this section we will turn our attention to the careers of two academics widely regarded as visionaries in the area of sustainable tourism. The two academics we have chosen are Pauline Sheldon (Professor Emerita – University of Hawaii School of Travel Industry Management) and Richard Butler (Emeritus Professor University of Strathclyde). At the time of writing they are either members or emeritus members of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism. Butler's pioneering work into the tourism life cycle (1980) is perhaps unique amongst tourism scholarship more broadly in that it has become the foundation for teaching and scholarship across a range of studies into destination management (Anon, 1993). His work *Alternative Tourism Pious Hope or Trojan Horse* (R. Butler, 1990) also represented one of the earliest critiques of the automatic alignment of sustainability with alternative tourism.

It has been suggested throughout the course of Butler's engagement with sustainable tourism debates that sustainability issues cannot be framed as 'problems that need to (or can) be solved or mastered, but rather as multifaceted realities that should be studied from as many different angles as possible' (see Suntikul, 2014, p. 510). This idea of a multifaceted reality is evident in Butler's approach to academic collaboration. David Airey once observed that Butler 'is very supportive of students and new researchers, always ready to provide advice and never tries to undermine or belittle their work' (personal communication, 2014 in Suntikul, 2014, p. 506). Butler himself once noted that 'sustainability is too important a path to be taken lightly or left to academics or worse, politicians or entrepreneurs' (McCool, Butler, Buckley, Weaver, & Wheeler, 2015, p. 241), placing it as central theme for tourism education. Academics such as Butler, by engaging in speaking and educating for sustainability, have helped ensure that sustainable tourism has become a central tenant in the tourism industry and acknowledgement of this contribution is only recognised if we move beyond the academic

management boundaries imposed in the new corporate education frameworks and engage with society at large on how best to maintain resources for the long term.

The values driven ideals of society characterise the wickedness of sustainability debates. Raelin (2011) has suggested that leadership-as-practice must always 'assert the value of democratic involvement by parties to leadership on a concurrent and collective basis' (p. 17). Such principles have been in evidence in Sheldon's signature contribution to the study of sustainable tourism, the Tourism Education Futures Initiative (TEFI). Founded with Fesenmaier in 2007, it has sought to fundamentally reassess the skills that would be needed by tourism graduates. Through a collaborative process involving buy-in from academia, industry and other stakeholders (Sheldon, Fesenmaier, & Tribe, 2011), Sheldon and her collaborators developed TEFI around a series of values and associated skills that future graduates should embody around stewardship, mutuality, ethics, knowledge and professionalism (see Barber, 2011).

In recent years, numerous studies have sought to operationalise Sheldon and her collaborators work around TEFI and apply values ideals to tourism curriculum development (Barber, 2011; Canziani, 2014; Gretzel, Isacsson, Matarrita, & Wainio, 2011; Wilson & Small, 2013). More still have sought to employ TRINET (the Tourism Research Information Network) as a mechanism for engaging in debate or operationalizing their own research. In the next sections, we will not look specifically at these and the leadership outcomes of Sheldon or Butler's careers. Doing so would run the risk of aligning to 'Chia's [notion of] "means ends analytical logic" and what Bourdieu calls "intellectualocentrism" whereby causal logic, intentionality, deliberateness, instrumental reason or a vocabulary of intentions, rules, plans and laws are imposed by academics on more practical reason and activity' (Carroll et al., 2008, p. 7). Instead we will seek to focus on the *praxis* of leadership, drawing on selective instances from Sheldon and Butler's careers written for the journal *Anatolia* as we discuss the themes of dialogue, stewardship and critical reflexivity

Leadership as a relational and dialogic practice

In an editorial to mark 25 years of the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Bramwell et al. (2017) drew attention to what they defined as the incredibly privileged position of tourism academia. With this privileged position comes not only benefits, including the ability 'to help young people prepare for the world they are about to enter', but also an obligation to educate and research in a manner that is impactful in a more and more complex world (Bramwell et al., 2017, p. 4). Kurucz et al. (2014) have argued that tertiary educators need to look beyond a perceived need to functionally train the next generation of management professionals. The practicalities of this task, however, are becoming increasingly difficult on account of changes in government policy, the predominance of neoliberal thinking in education and industry (Ayikoru, Tribe, & Airey, 2009), and pressure to provide flexible modes of learning to an increasingly discerning and diverse student market (Dredge, Airey, & Gross, 2015). And yet, as tourism academics continue to debate their role in an evolving and complex environment there is a realization that

academic institutions can 'serve as public spheres of conscientisation...becoming centres for inquiry and action, encouraging participation from stakeholders in local, regional, national and global spaces (Kurucz et al. 2014, p. 454).

While sustainability is an essentially a value charged idea demanding the interplay of different, often competing voices to create a sustainable future; centralized models of leadership often fall short in addressing such concerns of systemic intelligence. They focus on the unique vision, inspiration and competencies of individual leaders, rather than on the (relational) processes of developing shared understanding through which leadership unfolds. Against this background, the leadership-as-practice perspective offers a much more 'post-heroic' perspective of leadership (Bolden & Gosling, 2006; Carroll et al., 2008) where leaders are viewed as facilitators of dialogue (Raelin, 2013). With respect to Richard Butler, Weaver (personal communication in Suntikul,2014, p. 511) has described Butler as one of the 'great gentlemen scholars of our field' on account of the reciprocal relationship he has forged with those around him. In Butler's case dialogues with other pioneering academics (incl. Geoff Wall, David Airey) has led to the publication of numerous works that are now considered classics in the field (see Suntikil, 2014). Dialogues have allowed Butler to explore the possibilities inherent in different research paradigms. The leadership outcomes that dialogues afford include the provision of an opportunity for collaborators to think out of the box through intellectual stimulation For Butler, his ability to 'separate the evaluation of an idea with the assessment of the individual that has expressed it' (Wall in Suntikil, 2014, p. 508) is essential, both as a mechanism for seeing the long-term potential of colleagues, as well as to encourage the interdisciplinary foundations of positive sustainability outcomes.

Susanna Curtin (in Doorne et al., 2007) has described the life of an academic through the analogy of surfing; 'sometimes you are on top of a wave feeling exhilarated and alive, and at other times you are beneath the water struggling to come up for air'. How we navigate the waves of different jobs that characterise our academic development is often determined by the dialogues we have with others. Mihalič (2015) writes how Sheldon was able to bridge the gap between an early training in economics with a subsequent study of tourism through the encouragement of Turgut Var who recommended that she conduct work both in the areas of methodology and tourism forecasting. Later in her career it was dialogue with Jafar Jafari that laid the foundations for the development of TRINET. To date the legacy of TRINET is recognised by Sheldon as being the dialogic opportunities it has presented for the creation of meaningful connections between tourism scholars (see Goeldner, 2003).

The opportunities that are afforded to academics through the use of programs like TRINET is reflective of an idea from Spicer, Alvesson & Karreman (2009) who have argued that critical dialogues provide the opportunity to reflect on the foundations of one's uncertainties. By engaging with others it is possible to 'ask questions about what works, what is feasible, and what those we address perceive as relevant' (p. 545). The challenge for academics therefore becomes how best to enter into a dialogue with the range of stakeholders who are responsible for decision making, without privileging particular groups on the basis of their authority or status In doing so, academics must abandon the search for singular 'right' answers (Ferdig,

2007), embrace contradiction and uncertainty, and challenge the hegemony of prevailing discourses and their exclusionary effects.

Leadership as stewardship

Traditional conceptualisations of leadership as form of stewardship refer to the notion of a custodian of values, one who is able to navigate the intricate web of stakeholder values that exist in a global business environment (Maak & Pless, 2006). The responsibilities of stewards (often known as servant leaders) extend to the relinquishment of personal ambitions in service of wider obligations to the community in question (Sergiovanni, 2000). In an increasingly complex tourism environment, Pearce (2005, p. 32) wrote optimistically that the role of tourism academia is to make a 'contribution to creating human satisfaction, to fostering desired change, and to creating a more socially connected, tolerant world'. For such outcomes to be achieved, there is a necessity that academics not only understand the daily realities of the different groups that make up the international tourism system. Stewardship also involves a focus on the development of 'collective welfare over the long term' (M. Hernandez, 2012, p. 176). This form of sustainability leadership requires that economic interests are embedded within and serve, rather than dominate, social and environmental concerns (Kurusz et al., 2014). Thus, while on a micro-level 'good' leadership in sustainable tourism is contextually contingent and will be determined through participation, shared leadership practices, collaborative communication, empowerment, and trust this must be connected to a shift in perspective on a macro-level where the primacy of economic interests in tourism education and practice is fundamentally called into question.

The latter point is not trivial in a global tourism context where sustainability practices have been found to act only not only as indicators of corporate social responsibility but also as a means of corporate reputation building and profit maximization. Viewed in this way, corporate sustainability practices can mask or conceal tensions that exist between the neo-liberal growth paradigm and genuine change efforts towards greater environmental sustainability. Adding to this complexity is the trend for academics to align their work to the specific concerns of industry (e.g. Miller, Rathouse, Scarles, Holmes, & Tribe, 2010), emanating from a tightening of the research/ teaching funding process (Airey, 2015). As Buckley (2012) has identified, tourism stakeholders are frequently not interested in research for its own sake, but rather on account of its ability to facilitate more effective and efficient business practices. This impetus creates tensions for academics as they look to engage in collaborative leadership practices that take into consideration the values and needs of a broader range of stakeholder groups. The stewardship perspective is instructive here in recognising that "the products of research" must not "become tools for advocates, politicians and entrepreneurs" (Buckley, 2012, p. 537).

Sharpley (in Sharpley, Scott, Macbeth, & Smith, 2013) observes that the navigation of the intricate web of stakeholder values in a sustainable tourism debate is often easier said than done. Recalling an early personal attempt to re-balance the debate over the sustainability of mass tourism versus alternative tourism, Sharpley

observes that at the time, the 'criticism of the paper was unsurprising' (Sharpley et al. 2013, p. 194). Since its release, however, attitudes have shifted and the World Tourism Organisation now states that 'Sustainable Development Guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism (UNWTO in Sharpley et al. 2013, p. 194). Where stewardship is practiced effectively, the result will hopefully be a 'positive cycle of intergenerational reciprocity' (Morela Hernandez, 2008, p. 121). In this way it is interesting to reflect on the personal sentiments expressed by the authors of the portraits of Richard Butler and Pauline Sheldon for *Anatolia* (MihaliČ, 2015; Suntikul, 2014). For Mihalic (2015), Sheldon has demonstrated leadership not so much on account of her ability to navigate the roles of formal leadership positions but, rather, through her ongoing practice of cultivating the abilities of others.

Academic Leadership as a critically reflexive practice

Ren, Pritchard and Morgan (2010) have drawn attention to the recent call for greater levels of reflexivity in the study of tourism. Connected to the so called critical tourism perspective, reflexivity has been encouraged as a mechanism to raise awareness of the 'discursive formations which underpin and structure tourism's architecture of knowledge' (Ateljevic, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2007, p. 6). Similarly, Raelin (2016a) has argued that reflexivity is an essential characteristic of leadership-as-practice on account of the need for all leaders (and future leaders) to recognise that their agency comes not from structure, but rather from a constant contestation of ideas between a community of fellow inquirers. Reflexivity 'involves the self-critical consideration of one's own assumptions and consistent consideration of alternative interpretive lines (Alvesson, 1996, p. 468). It is interesting that – for leaders who have subscribed to practice-based philosophies – the ability to reflect is often tied to their roles as stewards. Schott (2016) has written on the approach that Douglas Pearce employed when Head of Group at Victoria University (Wellington) where his door was always open to anyone (including students and colleagues) who sought his guidance or constructive feedback. Doing so, Schott (2016) notes perhaps gave Pearce the opportunity for impromptu self reflection as he 'gained a deeper involvement with a range of topics and methodologies' over an extended period; a valuable service even if it does come with an opportunity cost of time to produce one's own research outputs (p. 134).

While it could be said that Pearce's responsibilities are to be expected in an administrative leadership role (Braun, Peus, Frey, & Knipfer, 2016), what is interesting for many academic pioneers is that formal leadership roles do not close off the need for future personal growth and reflection. Mihalič (2015) for example observes that the opportunity to take on the position of chair of the BEST-EN Tourism Network presented Sheldon with the opportunity to learn more about sustainable tourism. Butler (in McCool et al. 2015) describes the opportunity to engage in debates with other leading sustainable tourism thinkers as a pleasure. The ideas of Butler (in McCool et al. 2015) are his own. However, much as he now advises junior researchers, we must always be willing to engage with others in intellectual debates. While a researcher in the future may be working on something

that they are passionate about, they must at the same time be willing to 'modify it, accept criticism, and change things' (see Suntikil, 2014, p. 512).

The challenge of critical reflexivity is, however, not limited to reflections on the self and our work with students and peers. Entailed is also a broader, more critical reflection on 'who leads' and 'who is being led'. While the leadership-as-practice perspective offers a democratic understanding of leadership that seeks to include a diverse range of stakeholders in sustainability debates, this should not blind us to the politics of knowledge and representation that tend to privilege some social groups while marginalizing others. As Adams et al. (2011, p. 168) ask, 'which group's values frame and thus "lead", the … construction of climate change and sustainability as issues for organisations to respond to?' Here, academic leadership praxis can play an important role in exposing the competing interests and epistemic diversity that surrounds these social issues, since, 'without such diversity, leaders will continue to construct the notions of, and responses to, climate change and sustainability from the purview of the privileged' (Adams, Heijltjes, Jack, Marjoribanks, & Powell, 2011, p. 168)

Conclusions

The United Nation's 2017 Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development represented an opportunity for all tourism stakeholders to pause and question their own leadership perspectives and responsibilities. Academics have a long history of attempting to steer community debate around sustainable tourism. However, as we have noted, the success of academics in actually influencing industry practice has often been limited on account of the corporatisation of tertiary education and the tendency for academics to remove themselves from their own research as they strive for scientific objectivity (Feighery, 2006).

In this paper, we have suggested that leadership unfolds in the moment-by-moment change-making practices that catalyze the achievement of others to enable a more sustainable world. Too often we associate leadership with power, status and authority, which tends to overlook how leadership is 'complexly interwoven in responsive relationships between people, in which meanings, actions and our sense of what's going on shifts in and through time and across relationships' (Cunliffe & Hibbert, 2016, p. 53). Drawing on the cases of two pioneers in sustainable tourism, we have sought to show how focusing our attention on the practices of dialogue, stewardship and critical reflexivity can offer a contribution to sustainable tourism development beyond narrowly defined metrics of scholarly output in corporate educational management.

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