

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Tourism and the Academic Voice

Today, tourism academia is recognized as a 'mature' field of scholarly inquiry; one with the ability to advise industry and policy makers whilst also equipping future leaders with the practical knowledge, critical thinking, and nuance to guide the sector into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We have access to an ever-increasing number of disciplinary and other perspectives that can be applied to the study of tourism management and practice. The outcomes of our work can, in turn, be communicated through hundreds of academic journals, blogs and personal/ departmental social media pages. And yet, tourism academia remains a marginal concern for many in the tourism industry who are often less concerned with philosophical discussions over their future, or the application of niche theoretical perspectives than they are with their own immediate survival in the face of unprecedented economic, social, and environmental challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing this, a number of scholars have sought to explore the future of tourism in a post pandemic world. Such critical retrospection is understandable given both the seismic effects of COVID-19 and tourism academia's propensity for naval gazing in light of longstanding questions as to our legitimacy as a field of scholarly inquiry. However, it also poses a fundamental question for the academy, which I wish to discuss here; what is (and should be) the tourism academic voice in a 21<sup>st</sup> century world?

The term 'academic voice' has not been considered at-all in any published tourism output, which is surprising in that it refers at a philosophical level to "what distinguishes your thoughts and words and those of other authors" (University of Melbourne, ND, para 1 in Robbins, 2016, p. 133). Our thoughts and words are a representation of the way we see the world, our research paradigm, which is filtered through our 'tourism knowledge forcefield' (who we are as a person; the rules we live by; our position; ends and ideology in Tribe & Liburd, 2016). There is no archetypal tourism academic, so inevitably how we apply our craft varies. On this, I am reminded of Justice Stephen Breyer, now retired Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court, who argued that all justices have access to the same tools of constitutional interpretation – text, tradition, history, precedent, a statute's purpose and consequences (Breyer, 2021). However, the weighting that they afford to each tool varies, which has led both to differences in how one reads statutes but also to allegations that a justice might be allowing their training to be supplanted by allegations of judicial activism (French, 2010). For some, the voice of a justice is based on a strict interpretation of laws as they were understood by people when they were written. For others, however, their own judicial voice allows them to see the world through an evolving lens, one where the previously marginalized voices in society might be empowered by more enlightened perspectives wielded by thought leaders. This latter perspective has parallels to critical management/ tourism scholarship and its interest in challenging the written/ unwritten rules which a community lives by; challenging the status-quo to effect outcomes that are more in-keeping with a more inclusive version of reality.

The present author adheres to a perspective of the academic voice that it is "a socially constructed concept that cannot be separated from the experiences, emotions, and identity of the writer and, thus, constitutes a reflection of an author's way of knowing" (Mitchell, 2017). For instance, I cannot deny the role that my Christian faith has led me to look at tourism phenomena in specific ways (Schweinsberg, 2023a, 2023b). And yet, should I allow my academic voice in all its complexities to intrude on my investigation of tourism management processes, when aspects of my perspective cannot necessarily be justified based on scientific framings of reality? Similarly, on what grounds can I justify an expectation that people operating in the world of tourism should listen to my voice when it is offered? The world at-large typically legitimises academics because of the scientific processes we apply to our work, which allows us to analyse situations and provide nuanced advice to policy makers, industry, and society. This is well; however, academics are also people and through their writing, public

speaking, and advisory activities they have a 'voice', which is often not available to the wider population – we have a megaphone, so why not use it? Throughout the tourism academy we can see people who in addition to being serious scholars are also advocates for a range of social, educational, political, and other causes in the world (Cooper & Hall, 2024); for evidence of this one only has to witness commentary on TRINET (the Tourism Research Information Network). An academic's belief in a particular cause says something of them as a person; this includes their upbringing; their personal, educational, and professional experiences, and opportunities. We cannot compartmentalise our thinking and assume that our values-based perspectives around fundamental human rights such as equality and diversity can be applied only in relation to our examination of a specific tourism management issue. Rather, they can and should pervade every part of our character and inform the full range of our educational and research work.

John Stewart, the American producer, writer, and political observer once suggested that "if you don't stick to your values when they are being tested, they're not values, they're hobbies". While I would not wish to disagree with this assertion, the rubber frequently hits the road when an academic's values clash with the perspective of others in society; be it our academic institution, other members of the academy, the industries we advise or society. The fact that we can disagree with people in any or all of these groups is not inherently a bad thing given the range of social, economic, and environmental issues that tourism academics engage in. The purpose of academia is to develop ideas that are on the limits of human knowledge; and on this we should expect disagreement. Hall (Tourism Horizon, 2023) has noted that there is a general hesitancy to criticize other academics given the possibility of offending, even by means of established comments and rejoinder functions in journals (Schweinsberg, 2018). In the future we need to exercise our voice and develop knowledge in a way that encourages civility and personal critical reflection. We should learn from people we disagree with, adjusting our perspectives if needs be with a focus on building knowledge and understanding for both us and others.

As part of this we should critically consider what the wider world of tourism needs from academia in a particular tourism setting or context. Do they want academic unanimity and for this reason should individual academics who disagree with the status-quo be best served by shelving their critical voice as their views will complicate debates at a time when consensus is needed (Schweinsberg, Fennell, & Hassanli, 2021)? On this I am reminded of the academics who wrote during the COVID-19 pandemic advocating for a need for a new sustainable future for the sector. Buhalis recently argued that these academics "were wrong in their forecasts [and the] lesson we should learn is that savvy consumers are looking to travel no matter what" (Tourism Horizon, 2024). In the short to medium term, I agree with Buhalis in the sense that tourism has generally grown strongly in the post pandemic period. At the same time, however, I would argue that the success in this line of academic argument suggesting a new future for tourism should not be measured in terms of whether it fundamentally changed traveler motivations or led to a reorganization of tourism destinations in the immediate years just after pandemic. Rather, its value lay in putting a counter argument on the public record, noting that as tourism attempts to regrow there will be consequences for the choices we make. Our voice may not be welcome in some tourism contexts but by asking probing questions we are laying the foundation for either a gradual change in societal perception over time, or for the rejection of our position, which by exercising our voice we are ensuring is being made with a fuller appreciation of the complexities of a situation and the consequences.

If we return to the arguments put forward by Robbins (2016) we can see that one develops an academic voice through bringing something of one's self to their scholarly output. In recent years there has been a greater appreciation in the academy of allowing marginalized voices a chance to be heard (see for example Correia & Dolnicar, 2021). And yet, our ability to express oneself is still constrained

by the competitive pressures on members of the academy (Schweinsberg, Sharpley, & Darcy, 2022). To-date the majority of the published literature looking at issues and approaches to the development of an academic voice has focused on the voice in writing (Canagarajah, 2022; Dong, Liu, & Lu, 2023; Fløttum, Dahl, & Kinn, 2006) and the voice in relation to academic communications in the area of media (Goyvaerts, 2021). The reader is directed to these and other similar sources for a discussion of how they might develop their own voice. What I want to finish this short article with is by considering an idea put forward by Cunliffe (2018) who suggested that to have our voice heard involves being seen as 'the other' by many of our academic brethren. We will be seen as 'different', which can cause issues for "getting published, gaining tenure, building a career and being a credible researcher" (p. 10). However, at the same time it also gives us an opportunity to carve out a niche, just so long as someone will listen.

When I started my own academic journey my own research trajectory built on my PhD scholarship, which looked at new ways of understanding the effects of rural tourism development on host populations (Schweinsberg, Darcy, & Wearing, 2018; Schweinsberg, Wearing, & Darcy, 2012) as well as working with my supervisors stemming on common research interest, e.g., tourism development in national parks and tourism/ climate change interactions (e.g., Wearing, McDonald, Schweinsberg, Chatterton, & Bainbridge, 2019; Wearing & Schweinsberg, 2018; Wearing, Schweinsberg, & Johnson, 2019; Wearing, Schweinsberg, & Tower, 2016). In short, like many I played the publishing game, focusing issues relevant to the academy and to policy makes. And yet, whilst I am proud of this work and its outputs, I want my voice to impart a legacy (see Schweinsberg, 2024), which makes sure that something of 'me', no matter how small, is remembered. It was for this reason that I decided to deliberately consider issues of personal religious faith in the study of tourism; a decision, which has been described as a passing comment as 'courageous' by an associate editor in one of the leading tourism journals. This research, which has currently seen two published papers on what it means to be a Christian and an academic (Schweinsberg, 2023a, 2023b) and a paper (Schweinsberg & Sharpley, 2024) looking at the role of the Bible as a historical source in the study of Christian travel has received mixed comments from reviewers, e.g.:

I am an atheist, but I grew up in a Christian context. I really enjoyed reading this paper.

[I think it would fit] better in a biblically related journal.

I do not agree with the author where they state, "...it is not possible to distinguish the study of tourism from my Christian faith." Does it not depend on the topic and the approach one is taking? I study religious tourism, and do not always state my positionality as a Christian or discuss Christian theology. I understand what the author is trying to say here, but I do not agree.

(Selected excerpts from anonymous reviews)

What this process has shown me is that to establish an academic voice is not getting everyone to agree but rather having the courage of your convictions and recognising that the value in the inclusion of a counter narrative into the tourism knowledge discussion. As the tourism academy becomes more diverse it is vital that we continue to bring something of ourselves to the study of tourism. Whether one's voice will gain traction in the wider academy or industry is for others to say, however, what is important is to not produce scholarship that is akin to the salami slicing, which whilst boring adheres to the requirements of grant bodies and other funding institutions (Tourism Horizon, 2023). Rather we need to be developing our own voices to challenge tourism as a field of academic inquiry to evolve.

The fact that it also allows individual academics to feel an individual sense of self-worth, so much the better.

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