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Liburd, Janne; Duedahl, Eva; Heape, Chris

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Co-Designing Tourism for Sustainable Development

Janne Liburd\textsuperscript{a*}, Eva Duedahl\textsuperscript{b}, Chris Heape\textsuperscript{c}

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\textit{a*} Janne Liburd (corresponding author, liburd@sdu.dk) Professor, D.Phil, PH.D., Professor and Director of the Centre for Tourism, Innovation and Culture at the University of Southern Denmark. By ministerial appointment, Janne is the Chair of the UNESCO World Heritage Wadden Sea National Park. She is a cultural anthropologist: her research interests are in the fields of sustainable tourism development, innovation and tourism higher education.

\textit{b} Eva Duedahl, PH.D. Fellow at the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences Faculty of Business and Social Sciences. Eva researches on collaborative design in relation to sustainable tourism development transitions. She was a research assistant and tutored postgrad sustainable tourism development courses at the University of Southern Denmark and is currently involved in the tourism bachelor programs at the Inland Norway University.

\textit{c} Chris Heape, PH.D., Independent design research consultant and design facilitator. Chris has worked for the past 25 years as designer, design researcher and design educator, for the most at the University of Southern Denmark. For the past 6 years, Chris has focused on introducing design education processes and methods to tourism education and research. Chris is now an independent design research consultant and design facilitator.
Co-Designing Tourism for Sustainable Development

Abstract

This paper addresses the need to transform tourism practices with others. Its contribution is a critical conceptualization of how collaborative tourism design can facilitate sustainable transformation. Recognizing SDG #17 to “Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development” we argue that collaboration - not only partnerships and cooperation - should be a central tenet for intentional change. Collaboration rests on the hypothesis that the sum is more than its individual parts (Huxham, 1996). We introduce how the collaborative design (co-design) of tourism contributes a unique range of processes, methods, tools and notably an attitude of mind that enables its practitioners to, with others, explore, reveal, encompass and address issues and nuances in an overall sustainable tourism co-design process. This understanding deliberately challenges the notion that a sustainable development process can be planned and micro-managed with pre-determined outcomes (Heape & Liburd, 2018). Examples from Denmark and Norway illustrate how sustainable tourism co-design intentionally aims to transform human relations, encourage stewardship and demonstrate how such a practice does not reach for quick-fix solutions. Findings indicate that we have yet to realize the power of collaboration, stewardship and ’other-regarding ’ethics to guide actions underpinning SDG#17 for more sustainable and resourceful futures.

Keywords: Collaborative Design, Sustainable Tourism Development, Stewardship, SDGs.
Introduction

Human actions and practices are principal drivers of planetary damage in the 21st century and as such have to change. The United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) acknowledge the shortcomings of sustainable accomplishments for people, planet, peace and prosperity. The SDGs are described as follows:

“The new Goals are unique in that they call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of social needs including education, health, social protection and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection. While the SDGs are not legally binding, governments are expected to take ownership and establish national frameworks for the achievement of the 17 Goals” (United Nations, 2016).

The proclaimed novelty of the SDGs deserves closer scrutiny. The SDGs challenge tourism scholars and practitioners to find new ways of understanding, acting and caring. While the SDGs are indeed concerned with broader social, cultural, political and environmental relations, they are predominantly framed by economic growth (Scheyvens, Banks, & Hughes, 2016; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Hall, 2019). In a tourism context, sustaining economic growth accentuates the importance of market-oriented approaches, managerialism and policy horizons projecting a largely unchanged global system to 2030, by when the Goals should be achieved (Higham & Miller, 2018; Fennell & Cooper, 2020). Yet to claim that sustainability is achievable over a period fails to appreciate that change and ever-evolving processes are the norm rather than the exception (Cooksey, 2001; Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005; Gössling & Hall, 2006; McDonald, 2009; Liburd, 2018; Sharpley, 2020). The Covid19 pandemic has made it abundantly clear that it is naïve to assume that “tourism that stays the same will go on forever” (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020; Hall & Butler, 1995: 102). Consequently, sustainable tourism development (hereinafter STD) is hardly rectified by business-as-usual with more cooperation and partnerships for the 2030 Goals, as stated in SDG#17.
Already in 1998 Butler asserted that the failure to understand the value-laden nature of the concept of STD has led to a common misconception. STD is a normative process which involves stakeholder values (Andersen & Nielsen, 2009; McDonald, 2009; Liburd & Becken, 2017). Shifting stakeholder perceptions and values will inevitably influence actions that may, or may not, facilitate sustainable transition processes. Jamal & Getz (1999) argued that dynamic, creative, social meaning-making processes engender flexibility so that people do not feel coerced or compromised from a consensus perspective. Further, as Levin, Cashore, Berstein and Auld (2012: 147) advise “[t]he challenge for […] multi-stakeholder processes in general, is to find ways to promote stakeholder learning that move away from an emphasis on achieving consensus, which militates against addressing super wicked problems” such as that of STD. We suggest that the wickedness of the SDGs, as there is no one solution, may also reflect the shortcomings of linear, rational management focused on sustaining growth (e.g. Pigram and Wahab, 1997; Monbiot, 2012). Conceptual bewilderment and continued promises of sustainable tourism has been extended by prospects of the ‘green economy’ or ‘collaborative economy’ while jeopardizing broader sustainable development objectives through its myopic focus on sustaining tourism and neoliberal economic practices (Hunter, 1995; Hall, 2015; Dredge & Meehan, 2018; Boluk, Cavaliere & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2017, 2019; Gössling & Hall, 2019). Relations between tourism and several of the SDGs thus raise concern about whether the SDGs are simply applied to mask business as usual, only now under the guise of sustainability (Scheyvens, Banks & Hughes, 2016).

The rationale for this article is to explore alternative ways for tourism researchers to identify and work with complexity, stakeholder values and dynamic interrelationships for STD. To advance SDG#17, we will introduce the notion of collaborative design (co-design) to STD. It is important to note that the concept of collaboration distinguishes itself from cooperation and other forms of coordination as championed by SDG#17. Collaboration does not imply a division of labour, which is often the essence of cooperation, co-creation, co-ordination, etc. (Huxham, 1996; Dredge, Ford & Whitford, 2011; Liburd, 2013 & 2018). Co-design takes its departure point in designing with rather than developing for. It is inspired by Heidegger’s notion of being, which at all times is a
matter of “being-possible” ([1927] 1998: 183). We propose that co-design of STD is a becoming with others, of transformational change and an unfolding of tourism’s contribution, not to itself (i.e. sustainable tourism), but to a better world-making with others. In other words, “designing-with is the quintessential expression of an ethical, ongoing involvement of others through a respect for their ways of being in the world and their sense of values” (Heape & Liburd, 2018: 232).

The aim of this paper is to introduce sustainable tourism co-design to critically advance SDG #17 based on rigorous theoretical foundations. We will do this by reclaiming a holistic concept of STD and argue that co-design can transform tourism practices and enable stewardship alliances for sustainable development. This positioning offers new opportunities for SDG #17: “Partnerships for the Goals” that specify that there should be “inclusive partnerships among the private sector, civil society and government, based upon […] principles and values, a shared vision, and shared goals” (UN, 2019). We propose to progress SDG #17 and the concept of STD as complex, open-ended and collaborative endeavours, thick with values and variations of interpretation of social, cultural, environmental and economic development principles and practices. Rather than understanding STD as a specific solution to a problem, service or product, one can consider the co-design of STD as a continuous process of becoming that emerges from the collaborative interactions of those involved. This differs from a conventional approach to STD based on the efficient management, economic growth, and control of specific objects, concepts or practices (e.g. Swarbrooke, 1999; Fayos-Sola, 2012). Thus, we deliberately seek to challenge the otherwise common understanding that a STD process can be efficiently planned, micro-managed and controlled based on pre-determined outcomes.

First, the conceptual reclaim is centred on UN institutional framing and brief review of key STD literature. Next, the methodology of tourism co-design and its distinctive link to STD is outlined, and we explain how its unique range of processes, methods, tools and attitude of mind can be leveraged. Based on teaching and research engagements in Denmark and Norway, empirical evidence is presented in the form of vignettes to enable in-depth exploration of how sustainable tourism co-design in practice influences human
relations, encourages stewardship, and in the process, works to avoid quick-fix, generalised solutions. The final section discusses findings related to the power of collaboration, stewardship and ‘other-regarding’ ethics (Jamal & Menzel, 2009) to guide actions for more sustainable futures. By advancing SDG #17 though sustainable tourism co-design we will demonstrate how transformations arise in the micro-detail of interaction between many people who collaborate and care.

Reclaiming the Concept of Sustainable Tourism Development

First, we focus on three UN institutional commissions, two of which are often overlooked (Fennell & Cooper, 2020), to reveal nuances of the structural context and introduce a range of interpretations of sustainable development. Second, based on extant literature, we re-appropriate the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2018: 15) definition of STD to give way for a holistic, conceptual reclaim with implications for partnerships and SDG #17.

UN Development Commissions

Framed as an interlocking crisis of humankind, in less than a decade (1977-1984) three UN Commissions were established to address the predicament of development and nature degradation. The Brandt Commissions (1980 and 1983) reported on the threat of poverty, economic inequality, environmental disasters and terrorism threatening the very survival of mankind. The overarching recommendation by the two Brandt reports was to increase financial flows from the North to the South. Brandt’s response reflects the international development agenda of the post-World War II era, where more direct and disciplinary practices of development had been institutionalised (e.g. the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations Development Program, bilateral aid agencies), and complemented by academical theories of modernisation (e.g. Rostow, 1952) and underdevelopment (e.g. Frank, 1967; Sachs, 1974; Wallerstcin, 1974). Underdevelopment theories refer to dependency, neo-imperialism and unequal relationships as systemic lock-in. The Brandt reports thus reconfirm a powerful world order framed as the developed and underdeveloped world; the north and the south; the First and the Third world. Note how this world order continues to permeate SDG #17 and
related indicators, such as SDG #17.6: “Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation” (UN, 2019). The Palme Commission (1982) reaffirmed the global risk of human extinction as the main problem of humanity. Addressed through disarmament, security and peace in the wake of the nuclear race between the USA and the former Soviet Union, Palme emphasised the importance of agency and participation at multiple levels of political practice, referred to as: “the interplay between people and those directly responsible for taking the momentous decisions” (Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, 1982: xiii).

The Brundtland Commission (1987) builds on Brandt’s advice to increase economic growth and advances Palme’s recommendation of securing “effective citizen participation in decision-making” through public hearings on five continents over three years (World Committee on the Environment and Development [WCED], 1987: 4, 28, 65). We later return to the conceptualisations of agency, participation and partnerships in the context of SDG #17. The Brundtland report identifies two sources, both cause and effect, of the interdependent world crisis: Third World poverty and over-consumption by the First World. Embedded in the development discourse upholding the continuation of market driven growth, sustainable development was defined as: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987: 43).

Before relating sustainable development to tourism, three important interpretations of emerge. First, the WCED definition of sustainable development is a holistic concept that hinges on economic, environmental, social and cultural development. Interpreted as “greening efforts which mutually recognise cost savings” (Boluk, Cavaliere & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2019: 858) economic and environmental sustainability enjoy no privilege above social and cultural sustainability. The concept of sustainable development implies both equity and ethics within and between generations. Note how the problems identified by the Brandt and Palme Commissions of global disparity and inequality in the worldwide distribution of wealth remain a key determinant of unsustainability. Still, interrelated concepts of ethics, equity, integrity, cooperation, peace and justice have
received limited attention by the UN, and the tourism academe with only few exceptions (e.g. Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010; Jamal & Camargo, 2018; Fennell, 2018).

Second, Brundtland was mandated to propose long-term environmental strategies for a warming globe to be achieved by year 2000. The SDGs reproduce Brundtland’s recommendation, reinforced by a static aim: “For sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to harmonize three core elements: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection” (UN, 2016). To argue that sustainability is achievable over a period of time falls out of the realm of sustainability and complexity science that document how system change, shifting stakeholder values, and ever-evolving processes are the norm rather than the exception (Jamal and Stronza, 2009; Liburd & Becken, 2017; Liburd & Edwards, 2018; Higham & Miller, 2018).

Third, the Brundtland report, the subsequent eight Millennium Development Goals, and the seventeen SDGs emphasise how meeting present and future needs not only involves economic growth in poor countries, but also the ability to sustain it through the strengthening of international, cooperative efforts (WCED, 1987; UN 2000; UN 2019). The concept of cooperation implies a division of labour and concerted management efforts. This differs from the concept of collaboration that rests on the hypothesis that the sum of the work is more than its individual parts (Huxham, 1996; Bramwell, 2015; Dredge & Jamal, 2013; Liburd, 2013). Here, we do not imply that power relations are equalised. The generative capability of power in collaboration is noticeable in that it can engender both the essence of competition and provide the means for developing a synthesis of perspectives taken on a given sustainability task.

This brief inquiry exposed a persuasive development discourse and institutional framing of world problems and solutions (Escobar, 1995; Said, 1978), still evident in the SDGs. Next, we will relate this to sustainable tourism development (STD) to enable a conceptual reclaim.

**Sustainable Tourism Development**
Conceptual definitions, practical concerns and various understandings of STD and sustainable tourism have received considerable academic attention (e.g. Sharpley, 2020; Ruhangen, Weiler, Moyle & McLennan, 2015; Bramwell, 2015; Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Mies, 1997; Butler, 1998; Cohen, 2002; Dwyer & Sheldorn, 2005; Guia, 2018; Hall, 2019; Hall & Lew, 1998; Liburd & Edwards, 2018; McDonald, 2009; Mihalic, 2016; Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005, Weaver, 2009; Wheeller, 1993). Suffice to say that there is a conceptual perplexity in the literature where sustainable tourism is centred on the viability of tourism and a balancing of the industry and environmental impacts (Hunter, 1995). Sustainable tourism is easily reduced to maintaining a ‘natural’ equilibrium as a measurable state toward which intervention strategies can be applied as an economic trade-off between present utilisation and presumed future needs (Hall, Gössling, & Scott, 2015; Bricker, 2018; Higham & Miller, 2018; Hall, 2019). Scant attention is paid to power relations and (shifting) stakeholder values to understand who determines what to preserve, on behalf of whom and where or if tourism should be developed (Schellhorn, 2010; Hughes & Morrison-Saunders, 2018).

Scholarly debate continues as to whether sustainable tourism outcomes are in fact sustainable, amid claims that STD can be achieved (Cater & Lowman, 1994; Cater & Goodall, 1997; Swarbrooke, 1999; Holden, 2005; Bricker, Black & Cottrell, 2013; Mihalic, 2016; Fennell & Cooper, 2020). Identifying tourism’s positive or negative impact easily conceals a normative, management-oriented rationale to develop tourism for others. Regulation and conservation efforts tie closely into this managerial perspective where irregularities and problems are addressed in causal, linear relationships. Fennell (2018: 6) referring to McKercher (1999) points to the ineffectiveness of traditional tourism models as they imply that: tourism can be controlled; its players are formally coordinated; service providers achieve common, mutually agreed goals; tourism is the sum of its parts; and an understanding of the parts will allow us to understand the whole. McDonald (2009) argues how such reductionist approaches to STD have hitherto acknowledged but failed to recognise its inherent complexity.

A conceptual reclaim
Based on the above, we propose a conceptual reclaim as a three-fold clarification. First, STD is a dynamic philosophy that aims to engage others in transformations toward doing better. It is neither a goal to be achieved, nor a quest for equilibrium. A dynamic yet systemic approach is needed to appreciate the complexities of STD and the wickedness of the SDG challenges. It is only when the complexity and interdependency of human interrelations, regions and socio-economic activities are embraced that tourism becomes a potential contributor to the broader societal aims of sustainable development.

Second, the UN (2016: 16) proposes that “we the Peoples embark upon an ambitious journey of Transforming Our World by bringing together the governments, private sector, civic society, the UN and other actors, mobilising all available resources to strengthen the means of implementation” captured in SDG #17. We suggest that collaboration - not just partnerships or cooperation – for intentional change is needed to address the global, wicked problems, which cannot be solved by a single organisation, sector or individual (Huxham, 1996; Walsh & Kahn, 2010; Cockburn-Wootten, McIntosh, Smith & Jefferies, 2018; Scheyvens, Banks & Hughes, 2016; Liburd, 2018).

Third, we propose that STD represents a collaborative space to engage future world-making with civic society and stewards, which has hitherto been missing in current literature on collaboration in tourism and sustainability research (Gosh, 2015; Liburd & Edwards, 2018). The concept of stewardship resonates well with notions of sustainability, collaboration and complexity, and is increasingly used in sustainability science to capture the values, agency, care and knowledge of dynamic interrelations (Neubaum, 2013; Liburd & Becken, 2017; Enqvist, West, Masterson, Haider, Svedin & Tengö, 2018; West, Haider, Masterson, Enqvist, Svedin & Tengö, 2018).

In short, our inquiry into the three UN Commissions has revealed how interrelated nuances of the structural context framing global problems and solutions are still prevalent in the 2030 SDGs. On the basis of the holistic, dynamic and future-oriented concept of sustainable development, and its application to tourism, we position a reclaim that rejects linear, cooperative and managerial solutions of the past, and raises implications for
partnerships and SDG #17. Our conceptual reclaim of sustainable tourism development brings to the fore: complexity and dynamic interrelationships, collaboration rather than cooperation, and stewardship and engagement with civic society. As such, a central question emerges: How can tourism scholars and practitioners find alternative ways to identify and work with complexity, values, and “encourage effective partnerships” for sustainable development, as stated in SDG #17?

Why tourism co-design?

As becomes clear in the above, there is an acute need to develop alternative ways, means, attitudes of mind and philosophical approaches that can make for more inclusive processes of collaboration for STD. Our answer, which we have explored and cultivated through both conceptual and actionable research with others for the past seven years, is to make the deliberate link between STD and tourism co-design. Based on a rigorous methodological positioning outlined below, tourism co-design enables a breadth of perspectives to be brought into play by using a range of processes, methods, tools and notably an attitude of mind that enables its practitioners to explore, reveal, encompass and address issues and nuances through dynamic interrelations in an overall STD process.

Practitioners, stakeholders and those otherwise involved, both professional and lay people, are encouraged to participate in STD processes as shared spaces, or fields of possibilities, where the outcome is not predetermined. As such, tourism co-design can be considered an unfolding rather than a foreclosure, where understandings and opportunities for new actions and practices emerge from positionings engendered within sets of relationships. Tensions are engendered between these positionings through an interplay of the hopes, dreams and aspirations of those involved and the inherent constraints of the present. Variations of interpretation in the tensions leverage shifts in understanding, which are ultimately expressed as emergent syntheses, or STD proposals. In order to engage this dynamic flux, participants improvise to deploy a range of sensibilities, skills and processes that are continually adjusted in close relationship with the contingency of the STD task in hand.
Participation is neither directed toward achieving consensus, as sustainability is a wicked problem with no one answer. Nor is there any attempt to reduce the complexity of the relational, ambiguous, generative and negotiative processes involved. Rather, participants are encouraged to engage that complexity by collaboratively exploring, revealing and leveraging both the participants’ and the STD task’s resources to allow alternative syntheses of understanding to emerge that, most importantly, those involved can identify with. This, whilst also recognising they are dependent on each other in an, at the same time, enabling and constraining relationship. Such understanding deliberately challenges the notion that a sustainable development process can be planned and controlled based on pre-established outcomes (Heape & Liburd, 2018). Examples from Denmark and Norway below will illustrate how sustainable tourism co-design intentionally aims to transform human relations, embrace values, encourage stewardship and demonstrate how such a practice does not reach for quick-fix solutions. We will now proceed to explain tourism co-design’s contribution to STD by outlining its rigorous methodology and methods.

Methodology: The How of Tourism Co-design

For the sake of clarity, we make a strong distinction between methodology and methods. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe methodology as: “A way of thinking about and studying social reality” where they consider research as something that: “...hopefully... moves us increasingly toward a greater understanding of how the world works” (ibid: 3-4). Methodology thus engenders a sense of vision, where researchers want to go with research. The techniques and procedures (method), on the other hand, furnish the means for bringing that vision into reality (ibid: 8). Our understandings of methodology, in this case the how of tourism co-design, and that of methods, the what of tourism co-design, are elaborated below.

Co-design is a social practice where participants relate to the dynamic and iterative nature of the task in hand where outcomes emerge from the social interactions of those involved (Heape & Liburd, 2018; Buur & Larsen, 2010; Heape, 2007; Minneman, 1991). Tourism co-design is not merely a matter of raising and hearing the voices of people influenced by tourism. It differs from well-established methods of civic participation in types of
tourism, such as community tourism (e.g. Murphy, 1983) and volunteer tourism (e.g. Wearing, 2001), where the aims of participation are predefined and controlled. Co-designing tourism leverages a plural epistemological and ontological position to research and development (Boisot, 1998; Liburd, 2012; Levin et.al, 2012; Jennings, 2018). It concerns the process of actively engaging and enabling distinct world views, values, culture and knowing of those involved in sustainable development processes to identify and leverage latent opportunities. Next, we further unfold three principal aspects of our methodological approach that are interwoven as a tourism co-design process of inquiry and experiment, before proceeding to methods as the ‘what’ of tourism co-design.

**Heterogeneous constructionism**

Against the reinforcement of status quo tourism Jennings (2018) advocates the use of a range of paradigmatic lenses to facilitate collaboration. Pernecky (2012), Liburd (2012), Hall (2019), among others, propose heterogeneous constructionism and pluralist epistemologies to counter position the managerialist, marketing-oriented belief that greater efficiency will solve tourism’s problems. Hall (2019) specifically emphasises a pluralisation of knowledge through collaboration to engender “other ways of framing, seeing and doing” to realise tourism’s potential to the SDGs (ibid: 2). By bringing the plural epistemological to the ontological in transforming existing tourism practices, the relational nature of heterogenous constructionism in tourism co-design is revealed.

**Complex processes of relating**

Tourism co-design draws heavily on complex responsive processes of relating (Stacey, 2001 & 2003; Shaw & Stacey, 2006; Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2000). Based on theories of George Herbert Mead (1932) and Norbert Elias (1956) social interaction is transformative. This perspective understands the sociality of people’s collective actions and participatory practice by noticing the complex, cultural and processual nature of human knowing, doing, making, relating and organising. In these ongoing interactions “practices change in the emergent processes of negotiating new meaning, new opportunities, new insights, new thinking and new doing” (Larsen & Sproedt, 2013: 2). New patterns of sense-making, sense-giving and understanding emerge as a result of the
interplay of many people’s intentions, not as the outcome of someone’s individual agenda.

**Pragmatism**

Both heterogenous constructionism and complex processes of relating can be further informed by pragmatism. Together, this interweaving of theory, pragmatic practice and processes of inquiry further contributes to the concept of tourism co-design. Dewey (1938: 1) states: “Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one which is so determinate in its constitute distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole.” A pattern of inquiry that begins with a questionable situation may be “disturbed, troubled, ambiguous, confused, full of conflicting tendencies, obscure…” (ibid). From this perspective, inquiry engenders change for those involved, what is encountered and the consequences and new meaning that emerge. Here, an understanding of knowledge is considered as contingent to the situation and as ontologically transformative (Barnett, 2004; Walsh & Kahn, 2010; Liburd, 2013).

As with complex processes of relating, tourism co-design recognises that power will influence how a collaborative process of inquiry will unfold. Elias (1956) understood power as interdependency; those involved are dependent on each other in an, at the same time, enabling and constraining relationship. This understanding of power relations does not aim to equalise power relations; more it acknowledges the generative capability of power in noticing how we each enable and at the same time constrain each other in our participation in the doings we share (Heape, Larsen & Revsbæk, 2015).

**Methods: The What of Tourism Co-design**

*Co-Designing*

Tourism co-design as an actionable practice also draws on design research and narrative research. Shared narratives, associations and metaphors are essential aspects of design practice (Heape, 2007 & 2015; Ochs & Capps, 1996). Designing is a process of inquiry, a reflective conversation with the materials of a design situation (Schön & Wiggins, 1992),
the construction and negotiation of meaning (Heape, 2003, 2007), and intentional change in an unpredictable world (Nelson & Stolterman, 2003). Designing is a social endeavour rich with ambiguity and moment to moment negotiation, where designs emerge from the interactions of those involved; a social practice that resonates with complex processes of relating. Stacey, Griffin and Shaw (2000) introduce the notion of variations of interpretation, where “we want to think of the ever-present, ordinary, detailed differences of interpretation in communication between people as the generators of variety and, hence, the source of novelty. [...] It is in these ongoing differences of interpretation that individual and collective identities are continually recreated and potentially transformed” (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000: 189). As such we can describe tourism co-design as a process of inquiry that moves from experiment to experiment as participants expand and inform that inquiry.

McDonnell (2013) touches on the ethical and humanness of doing design when emphasising that by noticing ordinary, everyday practice one can bring the overlooked aspects of lived experience and the dignity of ordinary behaviour into view, to which we add: and sense of values! Here we reiterate our position above that seeks to engender a tourism co-design practice where: “designing-with is the quintessential expression of an ethical, ongoing involvement of others through a respect for their ways of being in the world and their sense of values” (Heape & Liburd, 2018: 232).

As such, by drawing a unique range of co-design processes and methods into an STD process, the actual practice of tourism co-design encourages collaborative situations to occur among all of those involved. A practice that deliberately brings into play socio-cultural values and cultivates the dynamic relational, meaning making and pragmatic aspects of collaborative action and human interrelations. This interweaving of our methodological approach and actual methods of the practice of tourism co-designing will be further grounded in the following vignettes.

**Vignettes**

To explore how sustainable tourism co-design can progress SDG #17, we introduce four vignettes from Denmark and Norway. Serving as methods, a vignette is a short narrative,
description, story or snapshot of a social situation relevant to the issues in question (Heldbjerg & Liempd, 2018). Next, we briefly introduce the form and usage of vignettes, which we elaborate by presenting four selected vignettes that will be discussed in the subsequent analysis.

Vignettes are flexible in content and use, varying from crafting and discussing fictional or real-life situations in action research, to serving as a means of collaboratively presenting, analysing and discussing snippets of fieldwork, or at best a combination hereof (Lynch & Mannion, 2016; Nielsen, 2019; Duedahl & Blichfeldt, 2020). Based on the continuous co-construction of new, shared narratives, meanings and structures, vignettes are well suited to serve as verbal articulation between participants or as a means of analysis by intentionally focusing on the micro-detail of interaction between those involved. We are thus able to tap into and better understand individual and collective tourism aspirations and sustainability concerns of those involved (here: with civic society, the public and private sectors). The four vignettes draw on a series of facilitated sustainable tourism co-design endeavours carried out from 2016-2020 in Danish and Norwegian tourism educational, research and industry contexts. We have documented these as videos, photos, transcripts, protocols and field notes from which the following four vignettes are constructed as short written and visual accounts.

**Vignette 1: Our Lake**

“Our Lake” describes aspects of a year-long process in the context of Lake Mjøsa, Norway. During the 1970s the distressed ecosystem of the lake was improved by two “Actions for Mjøsa” initiatives, the latter led by Gro Harlem Brundtland and the Norwegian Ministry of Environment. Today, threats of climate change, invasive species, new pollutants and minimal collaboration challenge the lake. The latter is referred to as an “Each a King in their own garden” attitude, where those involved fear losing something by working with others who might harvest the benefits.

The participants first introduced each other to what Mjøsa means to them by using a photo while others listened and noted whatever caught their attention on post-its. They then presented in turn.
“I’m more than happy for Mjøsa. I grew up with Mjøsa. Today I live with Mjøsa as the basis for all my activities, whether walking, fishing, swimming, water-skiing, wake-boarding … the view is unique; the light, the colours, the atmosphere; it’s never the same; it’s always in motion” (Industry representative, using a photo collage).

“It’s about being close to Mjøsa … it feels calm; you sense the light and atmosphere and how you relax” (Industry representative, using a favourite view photo)

“Although not much happened after the event, this demonstrates the power of collective effort and mobilization across Mjøsa” (DMO representative using a photo of a full local harbour when national television visited).

“I don’t use Mjøsa much… there are geographical differences in how Mjøsa is used. In all modesty we… are not good at using Mjøsa. There’s something about seeing Mjøsa. We don’t see Mjøsa so much” (Invited researcher, without photo).

Participants first identified themes in their written post-its by noting that everyone had written “nature” and versions of “collective mobility” and “engagement.” After further discussion, the participants felt they needed a “vision” to connect the emergent themes. After discussing collective events and mobilization, the participants identified new issues of “bringing us together to foster local ownership, which would enable us to lift together”. These became: “this is our dream,” “why we try,” “the driving force” and “a shared motivation behind Mjøsa and tourism”.

*** Insert figure 1 approximately here ***

Other outcomes included ways of engaging locals and tourists in “Caring for Mjøsa” through alternative, local, industry investments and sports from which revenue could help improve the lake’s ecosystem. Through follow-up discussions, an industry representative reflected on how the process had created a space where: “It wasn’t about who has the loudest voice or most money. The process cut through all that noise”.

*Vignette 2: Alternative Certificates*
This vignette focuses on the Danish island of Bornholm. More than ten years ago, the island adopted a "Bright Green Island" branding strategy. In this regard, tourism practitioners sought to explore new potential in certifying outdoor tourism activities. The participants first discuss various types of certificates to then develop narratives that imagine worst- and best-case futures. A person from a volunteer association remarks:

“This is dreaming. It might look okay on paper, but it’s not reality.”

Finally, the participants reflect on their ideas and explore how to bring them into play. One group describes how:

“We started with certification, left it, then came back to it. First, we talked about how one must feel ownership. There must be a sense of community; it must be loosely organised yet create a sense of security and solidarity for one another… and having a stake in it… taking care of certain things together. Then, we asked ourselves what exactly the certification in all of this is? Instead of a certificate, we talked about ‘shared commitments’, we commit to some agreements.”

*** Insert figure 2 approximately here ***

Through issues such as inequality, inclusion and education, the discussion circled the notion that current certification does not account for the humanness inherent to tourism. In a final reflection session, a DMO representative asked the researchers why, as she saw it, there was a lack of business orientation:

“Were you trying to nudge us in a certain direction, as we only discussed green labels?”

Returning to Bornholm one month later, a tourism practitioner elaborated on his involvement in the co-design process and advocated for a shift in part of a presentation to guests: “From certifications towards focusing on how we actually get things done with each other every day.”

Vignette 3: Ways ‘to national park’
In Norway, local pupils aged 15-18 were invited to co-design ways ‘to national-park’ in its unexplored verb form. For this purpose, a co-design puzzle of hexagons and SDGs was developed. Participants discuss local tourism issues, for example, natural populations of musk and wild reindeers, which they note, thematise, and structure using the hexagons. Next, the participants share and note memories of visiting national parks, which they combine with existing hexagons. Finally, the participants negotiate and include relevant SDGs into their inquiries. A girl, somewhat hesitantly, says:

“It does not matter what we say or do. They, the adults and politicians, do not listen anyway”.

One group found the SDGs on hunger and health best aligned with their themes. Another adds a climate change hexagon. When asked why, she explains how animals in the region must be detained for a period before returning to farms for the winter due to radioactive particles from the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. Then another girl decides to add the memory of a family trip to a national park in USA and reflects on how long-haul travel contributes to climate change. To improve physical and mental health through interaction with nature, other pupils add “short-trips” as an alternative to their parents’ preferences.

Outcomes of new ways ‘to national-park’ with an SDG focus include proposing themselves as a corps of knowing and caring guides with ‘green passports’ who could facilitate knowledge, awareness and care among visitors. In the subsequent two months, the pupils develop their concepts into videos. One group presenting to local politicians and tourism practitioners said:

“Who is going to preserve and take care of our eco-systems? It’s critical we use the SDGs when developing our area for the future… to preserve and enhance biodiversity while ensuring the natural habitats of musk and wild reindeers… The aim of our concept is to ensure that any development is as sustainable as possible. To achieve this we must collaborate, we cannot succeed alone, and we must choose a sustainable way out, as opposed to the easy way, which often isn’t sustainable.”
A local politician encouraged further discussions and urged the pupils to introduce the sustainability propositions to their home region.

_Vignette 4: InnoAgeing_

The InnoAgeing project aims to innovate primary care for older residents and visitors through active, healthy ageing in and with nature, particularly the UNESCO World Heritage Wadden Sea National Park (WS NP) in Denmark. The first project phase (2018-2019) included ten half-day WS NP visits and co-design workshops with ten vulnerable, older male residents. The men were recruited based on social exclusion, decreased mobility and/or loneliness. During one of the nature walks, a former truck driver describes how he has no recollection of well-being in nature:

“I’m not quite certain why we’re walking around out here. Perhaps it’s a bit like a trip with the housewives’ association?”

“I’ve often been here before, but when I’m told about it, it changes. I see it completely differently when someone tells us about it. … Actually, one can go to the same place many times, if different people talk about it. It’s like putting on a new set of glasses each time – they say something new, I see something new.”

Also included were 19 residents, 11 tourists and 8 second homeowners (all +55 years old). These participants demonstrated high levels of immersion, care and connectedness with nature.

“Nature puts your life in perspective and reminds you that you are nothing but a human on this planet… We need to take care of nature because we are nothing more than a tiny part of this huge puzzle. On the one hand we must take care of nature and on the other, the Wadden Sea nature reminds you it is strong.”

“What you find beautiful, you nurture and keep close at heart.”

*** Insert figure 4 approximately here ***
Nature can be an important element of active, healthy ageing for residents and tourists, but this implies a fundamental shift in understanding nature as simple and other to man. Conditions must be set for older adults to actively engage with nature, sustainability and stewardship with others (Duedahl, Blichfeldt & Liburd, 2020).

**Analysis**

To grasp how tourism researchers can work with complexity, stakeholder values and dynamic interrelationships for STD, we engaged multiple, iterative rounds of analysing the vignettes. This stimulated identification of four empirically grounded, thematic openings. These are identifying with the task, designing and imagining, and working with pragmatism: co-designing alternatives.

**Identification with the task**

Revealing and transforming current tourism practices and values through narratives and complex responsive processes of relating (Stacey, 2001 & 2003; Shaw & Stacey, 2006; Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2000; Heape, 2015), we often ask participants to bring an artefact or photo of an area or topic of concern. As participants narrate, we encourage others to listen to the rhetoric used and note their interpretations of what is being said. By doing so, in vignette 1, ‘Our lake’, artefacts and photos reveal values of lake Mjøsa as a place of work, a place of growing up, and a state of being. One senses dynamic changes according to seasons, time of day and light. To others, Mjøsa is but a distant view. As they continuously add to, take turns, gesture-and-respond, and agree and disagree (Mead, 1932; Stacey 2001), participants are able to rearrange various fragments of meaning where themes are gradually interwoven and emerge within the participants ’ongoing’ interrelating. They are expressed as shared motivations and identifications with the task by considering “Mjøsa and tourism”, “a dream” and “why we try”. By exploring each other’s interpretations of narratives and values, participants begin to appreciate their various understandings of STD - or not: “I’m not quite certain why we’re walking around out here [in nature]”. While scant attention has been paid to power relations and (shifting) stakeholder values in determining what to preserve, on behalf of whom and where or if tourism should be developed (Schellhorn, 2010; Hughes & Morrison-Saunders, 2018), it
is critical to ensure a process of identifying with the task to motivate participants to share associations, experience and, in particular, their vulnerability of not knowing the right answer, or expected outcome of a sustainable tourism co-design process.

The process of co-designing tourism “cut through the noise” and moved beyond individual tourism agendas and selfish interests. By doing so, the collaborative process of inquiry revealed concealed dependencies among diverse participants and showed how power relating may indeed change (Elias, 1956). Participants in vignettes 1 and 4 acknowledge how their different values, interests and identifications with Lake Mjøsa and the Wadden Sea at the same time enable and constrain their collective doings in the co-design inquiry as well as in their daily individual and shared tourism practices (Heape, Larsen & Revsbæk, 2015). Perceiving the generative capability of power, it is within these ongoing differences of expression and interpretation that individual and collective identities are forged (Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2000) and sustainable tourism practices are continually recreated and potentially transformed with others.

It is possible to shed light as to how social interaction is transformative (e.g. Stacey, 2001 & 2003; Mead, 1932) through participants’ ongoing power relating and negotiation. Densely interwoven, shared patterns of new meaning, new opportunities, new insights, new thinking and new doing emerge (Larsen & Sproedt, 2013) and coalesce as potentially radical new tourism practices (e.g. “caring for” Mjøsa or caring ‘with one another’ in everyday tourism practice on Bornholm). Importantly, when these patterns of sense-making, sense-giving and understanding emerge, as illustrated amongst others through the shifts from purely economic understandings of tourism to those of time, responsibility and reciprocal care, these are the outcomes of the interplay of many people’s intentions, not the outcome of someone’s individual agenda.

Far from reductionist approaches of trade-offs, cause-effects and linearity that continue to impede STD (McDonald, 2009; Hall, Gössling, & Scott, 2015; Bricker, 2018; Fennell 2018), tourism co-design embraces the complex, value-laden and dynamic tourism practices with others to thus advance SDG#17. Further informing SDG #17, we next
explore how tourism co-design leverages collaborative spaces of designing and imagining to engender sustainable and more resourceful futures.

**Designing and imagining**

By asking people to carry out various STD tasks, one also increases the complexity of the relational nature of the going-on. It is from this task and relational complexity that relevant themes emerge. The four vignettes emphasise the importance and power of engaging participants in reflective conversation with the materials of a design situation to construct new meanings and intentional change in a wicked and unpredictable world (Schön & Wiggins, 1992; Heape, 2003 & 2007; Nelson & Stolterman, 2003).

Vignette 2 revealed how alternative certification practices can emerge by imagining tourism futures with others. In the process, participants re-engaged narratives of how they get things done in everyday tourism practice, and infused these with values, worries, dreams and imaginings. As the inquiry unfolded, the notion, value, and understanding of a certificate changed from a “measurable product” to a “sustainable process”. Similarly, a multitude of future tourism imaginations emerged in vignette 3 with the local, Norwegian youth co-designing new ways ‘to national park’ by leveraging SDG possibilities through a puzzle. The participants added hexagons to collaboratively interweave these into new thematic patterns of meaning. As the youth discovered otherwise hidden or unforeseen local and global interconnections within what previously was seen as desirable suddenly become undesirable, and the before valued becomes devalued. It is reasonable to indicate that in all four situations described in the vignettes, those involved are presented with a situation where they are asked to present their perspective on the STD task and by use of various methods, the material they are working with becomes richer and more complex. As such, it becomes possible to re-configure tourism development and engender whole new, yet contingent sets of STD relations and meanings.

Paying careful attention to hesitations, such as a practitioner’s “this is dreaming ... it’s not reality” and that industry partners can suspect an intentional “nudging” into a “greener” direction, highlight the ambiguity of engaging, let alone legitimising work with stakeholder values, imaginations, feelings, perceptions and dreams to counter dominant
tourism development discourses in theory and practice. Co-designing tourism thrives on the resourcefulness of those involved; the diversity of values, capabilities, potentialities, experiences and backgrounds. By legitimising this process of heterogenous constructionism (Hall, 2019; Jennings, 2018; Liburd, 2012), it becomes evident how participants are capable of much more than they think. For instance, the youth in vignette 3 were able to take ownership of the SDGs and negotiate with the different associated targets of e.g. SDG #13: Climate action, SDG #15: Life on land, and SDG #3: Health, even suggesting themselves as “caring guides” in the co-design of new practices for sustainable development. The elderly in vignette 3 were able to walk and socialise beyond their own expectations when learning how experiencing the Wadden Sea is “like putting on a new set of glasses; every time they say something new, I see something new”. And the practitioners in vignettes 1 and 2 realised “we have to dare to believe in ourselves” as a wealth of opportunities and latent potentials emerged and materialised through the inquiry.

The different collaborative spaces described in the vignettes indicate how tourism co-design’s unique range of processes, methods and tools are not to be mistaken for ends in themselves. Rather, they encourage a space to emerge in which participants partake in an STD process and engage in better world making with others.

**Working with pragmatism: Co-designing alternatives**

This last thematic opening deliberately adopts an overall approach to identify synergies and opportunities through pragmatism. The four vignettes entail a short pre- and post-note to co-designing tourism. By exploring these is it possible to grasp how an unknown or indeterminate situation that is at first “disturbed, troubled, ambiguous, confused, full of conflicting tendencies, obscure…” is gradually transformed “into one which is so determinate in its constitute distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole” (Dewey, 1931). Alternatively put, this is how a process of co-designing sustainable tourism can leverage emergent, transformative patterns of inquiry and identify real alternatives to rational management of tourism and the SDGs.
“Our Lake” describes how past environmental alliances that collectively saved the freshwater lake, now challenged by adverse tourism practices, re-emerge as a new, collective caring for our lake Mjøsa. The second vignette from Bornholm demonstrates how an overt focus on formal certification outcomes and strategies transformed to caring ‘with one another’ in everyday tourism practice. The third vignette, ‘to National Park ’ illustrates how mistrustful youths’ notions of current national park practice changed to actively advocating tourism practitioners and politicians to not take the easy “way out”, and instead collectively care for our eco-systems and the development of our area. The fourth vignette demonstrates how older residents and tourists change their relationship with nature and the world through interactions with stewards who care. In the words of a second homeowner: “Nature puts your life into perspective and reminds you that you are nothing but a human on this planet”.

Considering that the agenda aimed at Transforming Our World (UN, 2016) frames tourism as a potential contributor to only four of 17 SDGs, and predominantly as driven by economic growth imperatives (Scheyvens, Banks, & Hughes, 2016; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Hall, 2019; Bricker, 2018), our transformed tourism situations highlight that tourism co-design can engender compelling alternatives to (a greening of) business-as-usual.

First, the diverse expressions of ‘our’ and caring ‘with one another’ capture a noteworthy shift from a utilitarian justification of tourism to other-regarding ethics (Jamal & Menzel, 2009; Neubaum, 2013). These surface through the becoming of micro-structures (Basten, 2011) and communities serving as new, dynamic stewardship alliances (Liburd & Becken, 2017) whist humbly acknowledging interrelations: “we are nothing but humans on this planet”. Second, by engaging with civic society, the public and private sectors, sustainable tourism co-design embraces the human dimensions of reciprocal care by approaching the global wicked challenges from an intimate, situated tourism context. From this perspective, the transformed tourism situations comprise new shared narratives and values of those involved. They serve as a powerful traction for STD driven by ownership and collaboration beyond traditional domains, sectors, organisations and individuals (Cockburn-Wootten, McIntosh, Smith & Jefferies, 2018; Scheyvens, Banks &
Hughes, 2016; Liburd, 2018). Across the vignettes it is also possible to note that people are confronted with change situations where their understanding of the STD task and their sense of identity and empowerment enables a shift from a utilitarian justification of tourism to other-regarding ethics. As such it is also reasonable to say that these ontological shifts in personal or professional identity represent the transformative nature of the social interaction that takes place when asking people to engage in a tourism co-design process.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The overarching contribution of this paper is based on a critical reclaim of the holistic concept of STD and rigorous methodological introduction to tourism co-design to critically advance SDG #17. By introducing co-design to STD, we engender a significant shift from an overt, rational management orientation to that of a sustainable tourism co-design process that takes its departure point in the notion of designing *with*, rather than developing for. We bring into play the potential that lies waiting to be nurtured if one considers STD as a complex, value-laden endeavour, the interrelated nature of which is continually evolving, rather than as a linear process and goal to be achieved (Cockburn-Wootten et al, 2018; Heape & Liburd, 2018). The latter remains evident in the UN 2030 SDGs which rest on five decades of powerful systems framing of world problems and solutions with insufficient attention paid to complexity, values and dynamic interrelationships. Herein lies our notable contribution to advancing SDG #17 considering how tourism co-design engenders a space for future world making that enables current and future practitioners to identify new, sustainable ways of understanding, acting and caring through collaboration.

The collaborative imagining of desirable tourism futures reveals how participants engage an unknown process framed by sustainable development. This demanding task requires participants to act with a high level of courage, trust and risk-taking while engaging that which is inherently yet to become. Nevertheless, this is exactly what enables participants in specific contexts to address the ‘other-regarding’ and wickedness of sustainable development and the SDGs. It is within the arising tensions of exploring *what is* and *what*
may become that participants are able to develop trust in each other, appropriate, and act upon STD as an open endeavour, simultaneously avoiding general or quick fix solutions.

Tourism co-design for sustainable development counter-positions reductionist approaches as it represents the quintessence of collaboration where the sum of the work is more than its individual parts (Huxham, 1996). Transformations thus occur in the micro-detail of interactions between many people who collaborate and who (come to) care. In that regard, the process thrives on the inimitable values, resources, knowledges, socio-cultural backgrounds and potentialities with which each individual contributes, while bringing these into play as a collaborative transformation of tourism. Here, an understanding of knowledge is considered as contingent to the situation and as ontologically transformative (Barnett, 2004; Walsh & Kahn, 2010; Liburd, 2013). Notably, “bringing together the issues of unknown futures and values on epistemological terms […] will also reflect on the kind of human development we want to see” (Barnett, 2004; Heape & Liburd, 2018: 226). Co-designing tourism for sustainable development is about shifting fixed notions by instead adopting an attitude of mind that legitimises alternative perceptions of how what is, who I am, who we are and desire, can become. An attitude of mind that is an ontological surrendering to and a becoming with others. A process where those involved appreciate that tourism co-design is a learning process for all involved, which will inevitably influence their sense of identity and appreciation of their practice (Heape & Liburd, 2018). The four vignettes demonstrate how tourism co-design is an attitude of mind of not merely being possible, but at all times a continuous, other-regarding process of becoming, which enhances tourism’s distinctive capabilities and human engagement with others and whereby tourism unfolds its being while contributing to better world-making – the SDGs. This, we coin sustainable tourism co-design.

Lessons from sustainable tourism co-design suggest how we should strive to embrace dynamic interrelationships, complexity, and enable stewardship values to emerge with others. Yet, our findings also indicate that we have yet to realize the power of collaboration, stewardship and other-regarding ethics (Jamal & Menzel, 2009; Neubaum, 2013) to guide SDG #17, rather than reach for general or quick fix solutions rooted in development and growth paradigms of the past.
It is important to recognize the limitations of our study. Our selected vignettes and outcomes are contingent on the specific people, places and values involved. Mindful of the Western bias of sustainable development, we recognize the limitations of the Scandinavian context in which our co-design endeavours were carried out, and in which the four vignettes are embedded. As researchers from small affluent countries, we strongly encourage fellow tourism researchers to embark upon sustainable tourism co-design endeavours in alternative contexts to continue unfolding practices of reciprocal care and responsibility with others.
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