

## **Bridging the gap: Co-design for Sustainable Tourism Development Education**

**Key words:** Sustainable tourism development; co-design; collaboration; education; transformative learning.

### **Introduction**

The aim of our paper is to introduce collaborative design (co-design) as an open-ended co-generative and co-learning endeavour in education for sustainable tourism development (STD) (Liburd, 2018). Specifically, we discuss how tourism co-design can bridge the gap between sustainable tourism development in theory and practice and enable transformative learning with others for sustainable tourism development (STD).

### **Conceptual framing: Sustainable Tourism Development and Co-design**

Conceptual definitions and practical concerns of sustainable tourism development have received considerable academic attention and have been exposed to substantial criticism (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Mies, 1997; Butler, 1998; Hall & Lew, 1998; Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Cohen, 2002; Dwyer & Sheldon, 2005; Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005; Wheeler, 1993; Weaver, 2009; Bramwell, 2015; Liburd & Edwards, 2018). There has been a relative neglect of how to implement the laudable principles and to educate tourism students to critically address why individual tourists, businesses and governments should consider their environmental, social and cultural performance rather than only an economic bottom line.

Collaborative design (Co-Design) is a process of *designing with* rather than *designing for* others. Designing with others is a central distinction that underscores the commitment to learning, empowerment, ownership and ongoing involvement of others (Heape & Liburd, 2018). With participating students, educators and practitioners, a thick potentiality and series of possibilities surface from the unique variations of expression and interpretation in contingent and ongoing complex processes of relating (Stacey, 2001). Transformative learning emerges as thematic patterns of meaning in the ongoing and shifting relating between those involved (Sproedt & Heape, 2014).

Applying co-design to sustainable tourism development education, we have developed the field of Tourism Co-design. Tourism co-design is an attitude of mind, which brings a unique variety of methods, tools and interventions to enable students, educators and practitioners to actively engage, with others as designers in sustainable tourism development (STD) (Heape & Liburd, 2018, p. 228). We consider STD as open-ended, where no one resolution applies. Tourism co-design unfolds from nurturing curiosity and revealing a constrained present towards exploring latent potentials for STD (Heape & Liburd, 2018; Liburd, Nielsen & Heape, 2017). Doing so often require engaging the known as unknown, and in turn reengaging the unknown. It is within these emergent processes of negotiating new meanings, insights and thinking that people may change and create more sustainable tourism practices. We refer to this as the identification of latent opportunities for STD.

Tourism co-design is a dynamic learning space filled with increasingly interwoven values, feelings, perceptions, memories, dreams and imaginations for STD. Their present state of learning and authentic being (Barnett, 2012) is transformed into an evolving state of becoming and confidence in engaging in the unknown and in future tourism world-making (Buur & Larsen, 2010; Liburd, 2013; Heape & Liburd, 2018, p. 229).

### **Empirical contexts**

We draw on a series of tourism co-design situations from Danish and Norwegian educational contexts to share our experiences and demonstrate how co-design assists in facilitating a learning environment that enable students and practitioners to critically challenge current understandings of tourism. Students explore inherent complexities, challenge taken for granted assumptions, and (re)discover everyday hidden dilemmas and paradoxes in STD. Identifying and working with latent opportunities for STD, among others, is captured in student project discussions of '*our* sustainable tourism futures' and students' identification with becoming philosophic tourism practitioners. This is not the same as saying that change is easily attained, nor socially desired, despite the new morality that has emerged regarding different ecological, social and ethical issues (Fennell, 2018). Less successful examples also include students' lack of risk-taking in search of the 'right answer', often underpinned by a linear and rationalist understanding of STD.

### **Contributions**

Tourism co-design is a mind-set of transformations, which cannot be limited to a tool or set of prescribed principles. Instead it offers a complex space for learning with others; and a space for transformation of the self; and a space to engage in identifying latent opportunities for STD as intentional change in an unpredictable world. Tourism co-design is not value-free but thrives on participants' identification and nurturing of a range of shared values, sensibilities and knowledges. "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, 2012; Heape & Liburd, 2018, p. 226). Therefore, we insist on creating higher education learning environments that embrace the complexities, responsibilities and challenges for sustainable tourism development and unknown futures with others.

## References

- Barnett, R. (2012). Learning for an unknown future. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 31(1), 65-77. doi:10.1080/07294360.2012.642841
- Bramwell, B. (2015). Theoretical activity in sustainable tourism research. *Annals of Tourism Research* Vol. 54, 204-218.
- Bramwell, B. and Lane, B. (1993). Sustainable tourism: an evolving global approach. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* Vol.1, 1-5.
- Butler, R.W. (1998). Sustainable tourism – looking backwards in order to progress? In C.M. Hall and A. Lew (Eds.), *Sustainable Tourism: A Geographical Perspective*, New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 25-34.
- Buur, J., & Larsen, H. (2010, November 29 - December 03). *Crossing intentions in participatory innovation*. Paper presented at the Proceedings of the 11th Biennial Participatory Design Conference, Sydney, Australia.
- Cohen, E. (2002). Authenticity, equity and sustainability in tourism, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* Vol. 10(4), 267-276.
- Dwyer, L. and Sheldon, P. (2005). Introduction: sustainability and mass destinations: challenges and possibilities, *Tourism Review International* Vol.9, 1-7.
- Fennell, D. (2018). *Tourism Ethics* (2nd ed.). Bristol: Channel View Publications.

- Heape, C., & Liburd, J. (2018). Collaborative Learning for Sustainable Tourism Development. In J. Liburd & D. Edwards (Eds.), *Collaboration for Sustainable Tourism Development* (pp. 226-243). Oxford: Goodfellow Publishers Ltd.
- Huxham, C. (1996). Collaboration and Collaborative Advantage. In C. Huxham (Ed.), *Creating Collaborative Advantage*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Hall, C.M. and Lew, A. (1998) *Sustainable Tourism: A Geographical Perspective*, New York: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Liburd, J. (2013). *Towards the Collaborative University: Lessons from Tourism Education and Research*. (Professorial dissertation) Odense: Print & Sign.
- Liburd, J. (2018). Understanding Collaboration and Sustainable Tourism Development. In J. Liburd & D. Edwards (Eds.), *Collaboration for Sustainable Tourism Development* (pp. 8-35). Oxford: Goodfellow Publishers Ltd.
- Liburd, J. & Edwards, D. (Eds.), *Collaboration for Sustainable Tourism Development*. Oxford: Goodfellow Publishers Ltd.
- Liburd, J., Nielsen, T., & Heape, C. (2017). Co-Designing Smart Tourism. *European Journal of Tourism Research*, 17, 28-42.
- Mies, M. (1997). Do we need a new moral economy? *Canadian Women Studies* Vol. 17(2), 12-20.
- Miller, G. and Twining-Ward, L. (2005) *Monitoring for a Sustainable Tourism Transition: The Challenge of Developing and Using Indicators*, Wallingford: CABI Publishing.
- Mowforth, A. and Munt, I. (1998) *Tourism and Sustainability: New Tourism in the Third World*, London: Routledge.
- Sproedt, H., & Heape, C. (2014). *Cultivating Imagination Across Boundaries: Innovation practice as learning through participatory inquiry*. Paper presented at the Conference: Operating Innovation - Network (CINet).
- Stacey, R. (2001). *Complex responsive processes in organizations: Learning and knowledge creation*. London: Routledge.
- Weaver, D. (2009). Reflections on Sustainable Tourism and Paradigm Change. In: S. Gössling, M. Hall & D. Weaver (Eds.) *Sustainable Tourism Futures. Perspectives on Systems, restructuring and innovations*. New York: Routledge, pp. 33-40.
- Wheeler, B. (1993) Sustaining the ego. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* Vol. 12, 121-129.