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Co-design for Sustainable Tourism Development

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Key words: sustainable tourism development; co-design; collaboration; learning; transformation

Introduction

The aim of our paper is to introduce and discuss collaborative design (co-design) as an open-ended co-generative and co-learning development endeavour (Liburd, Nielsen, & Heape, 2017, p. 29). Specifically, we discuss how tourism co-design enable transformation and learning with others in higher education and research for sustainable tourism development (STD).

Co-design and STD

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. As a participatory form of inquiry, co-design interweaves knowing, doing and making through its constituting relating (Heape & Liburd, 2018, p. 239). 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). Learning emerges as thematic patterns of meaning in the ongoing and shifting relating between those involved (Sproedt & Heape, 2014).

Applying co-design to tourism, 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 of an overall STD process (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. To cultivate students’ attention to this complex, transformative and socially oriented way of approaching STD, we may ask how they explore a city? Whether they meticulously plan or improvise along the way, who they meet and how they relate to each other? The principal pedagogical thrust is that students have greater resources than they realise and that they often navigate the unknown with ease (Heape & Liburd, 2018: 230). As participants articulate and reflect upon their emergent and situated practices they fine-tune and granulate inquiry in a temporal space of possibilities (Stacey, 2001). 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, 2004) is transformed into an evolving state of becoming and confidence in engaging in the unknown and in future tourism world-making (Liburd, 2013; Heape & Liburd, 2018, p. 229). This fundamentally challenges the belief that meaning and learning outcomes in tourism higher education can be assigned processes for others. Further unfolding this notion, our research has revealed that STD as a process, not an achievable goal, fosters new relationships and interactions where relational fields of inquiry emerge in which we actively participate in making meaningful, sustainable tourism futures.

**Empirical STD learning situations**

We draw on a series of co-design learning situations from Danish and Norwegian research and educational contexts to discuss fruitful and less successful experiences. Our analysed situations 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 students’ identification with becoming philosophic tourism practitioners, walking with elderly tourists and second home residents in nature for active heathy ageing, and project discussions of ‘our sustainable tourism futures’. 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, 1990 p. 44; Heape & Liburd, 2018, p. 226). Therefore, we insist on creating higher education learning environments that embrace the complexities, responsibilities and challenges of unknown futures with others.

Collaboration in tourism co-design is not a neutral undertaking. Collaboration implicates interests and power, which are easily diluted in the abbreviated use of co-operation, co-creation, co-ordination, etc (Liburd, 2013 & 2018). The concept of collaboration suggests that the creation of joint outcomes could not be generated by a single organisation or individual. As such collaboration may represent the essence of competition, which Huxham (1993, p. 599) referred to as “collaborative advantage”. We argue that collaboration also hinges on ethical and virtuous aspects, which must be other-regarding. This implies that one cannot expect oneself to be able to flourish without reciprocity and responsibility. Tourism co-design captures the fundamental interdependence between human behaviour, regions and socio-economic activities, whereby tourism becomes a potential contributor to the broader societal aims of sustainable development.

**References**


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