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Tourism and Design

Participatory Inquiry as a Possible Route to Innovation in Tourism

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Abstract

Innovation is essential in the complex and fluid social environment of tourism; for the practitioner, the essential capability is that of being able to learn and innovate, and to do so often. One must therefore reflect on how present methods of university education might equip tourism students (or indeed students in any social science) to develop the necessary innovation capability so as to meet the challenges of a complex, dynamic and essentially unpredictable world. Inspiration may arise from the field of design, wherein creativity and innovation are endemic. The design-inspired method of Participatory Inquiry may assist to bring about innovation in tourism firms and the use of Participatory Inquiry methods in education may provide a means to assist students to develop the innovative capability essential for future roles in the fluid, social arena of tourism.

Introduction

Though considerable debate arises as to the meaning of innovation, it fundamentally entails the implementation of new ideas, reflecting the twin aspects of creativity and use (Hjalager 2002/ 2010/ Hjalager et al. 1994/ Kanter, 1996/ Tidd & Bessant 2013/ Unsworth & Parker 2003). Kanter (1996:94) describes innovation as "the creation and exploitation of new ideas"; and Hjalager (1994, 2002) explains how innovation involves "further developments" of inventions, by "institutionalising the new methods of production or bringing new products or services to the market" (1994:198), or "making them into useful products" (2002:465).

Basically, innovation occurs when people are able to find and implement new ideas. Sounderstanding how peoplecome to find and implement new ideas presents as an important area of tourism innovation research. When it comes to unlocking the creative potential of individuals, attention has turned to various ways of working with teams or groups. Given the extant barriers around the lack of human capability in tourism, this arena is particularly relevant to the challenges facing the tourism policy, practice and education.

Although innovation is a personal and inter-personal undertaking, it is of course a situated undertaking occurring in a given context. Notably, the complexity and dynamism of tourism systems is such that they suitably evoke the view of a Complex Adaptive System (Liburd 2010/ Reid 2014), wherein stakeholder interactions create unpredictable outcomes (refer Gell-Mann 1991/ Holland 1993). Tourism systems are comprised of "complex organizational ecologies [and] dynamic network relations" (Gyimóthy & Larsen 2013:5),and this calls for the "adaptive management of complex adaptive systems [CAS]" (Liburd 2010:7). This dynamic social context creates a certain overarching context for innovation in tourism.At all scales tourism practitioners and policy makers face the complexity and dynamism of the social world, and the "wicked problems" (Rittel & Webber 1973) that exist in it.

As Rittel and Webber (1973) explain, the problems of the social world "are wicked and incorrigible ones, for they defy efforts to delineate their boundaries and to identify their causes" (1973:167); and any proposed solutions face "the growing pluralism of the contemporary publics, whose valuations of his proposals are judged against an array of different and contradicting scales" (1973:167). The problems of the social world are thus differentiated from the "tame problems" of science, which are "definable and separable and may have solutions that are findable" (1973:160). Within the social context, problem solving is about selecting a feasible course from multitudinous alternatives, when the dimensions of the problem and the results of any action are effectively unknown and unknowable, and where the results will be variably assessed by an array of different stakeholders. Within this context, problem solving, or the process of exploring possible solutions, should be seen as "an argumentative process in the course of which an image of the problem and of the solution emerges gradually among the participants, as a product of incessant judgment, subjected to critical argument" (1973:162). Accordingly, the social and dynamic context of tourism calls for emergent approaches to exploring opportunities for innovation.

The risk-reducing predictability seemingly offered by

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rational planning approaches has nevertheless led to their dominance in practice. Yet rational, linear problem-solving approaches are certainly not devoid of risk: by imposing structure at an early stage, before a problem can be properly understood, the risk becomes one of 'solving' the *wrong* problem; and, in stifling the scope for discovery, rational approaches reduce the scope for exploring opportunities and so bring the risk of lost innovation potential (Sprödt & Heape 2014). As Rittel and Webber (1973:164)explain, "Part of the art of dealing with wicked problems is the art of not knowing too early which type of solution to apply". Therefore, the question arises as to how emergent processes of exploration and discovery might come to be used to unlock creativity and power innovation in the complex social arena of tourism. Solutions may be found by looking to other arenas. Notably, the field of design is infused with creativity: designers are constant innovators, and every instance of a design is an innovation. So design may offer inspiration for innovation in tourism. The idea is not at all far-fetched: the logic for wider application of design is clear in the view of design as a "liberal art" (Buchanan 1992) and the idea of transplanting new knowledge from one field to another exists in "recombinant innovation" (see Tidd & Bessant 2013:259-260).

Design and Tourism Innovation

The intersection of design and tourism has received very little research attention to date, and the investigation of design methods as a route to innovation in tourism has been overlooked. However, recent research clearly points to the potential for design to inform innovation processes in tourism.

One clear signal arises in Participatory Innovation, which involves the practical application of design methods to foment organisational innovation. Premised on combining the methods of participatory design and design anthropology with the market orientation reflected in the popular (among industry) lead user approach of Von Hippel (e.g. von Hippel 1986), Participatory Innovation facilitates multi-stakeholder involvement in creative processes to trigger product or service innovations in organisations (Buur & Larsen 2010a/ Buur & Larsen 2010b/ Buur & Matthews, 2008/ Gottlieb et al. 2013). Though not yet applied in tourism, the method has been successfully tested in other commercial settings, demonstrating the potential for design inspired methods to stimulate group creativity and trigger innovation (Gottlieb et al. 2013).

Other researchers have been investigating the design-inspired method of Participatory Inquiry to leverage the creative potential of groups (e.g. Heape 2013/ Sprödt & Heape 2014). Participatory Inquiry essentially involves sense-making in unfamiliar situations; it is a quest for discovery through purposeful exploration of the unfamiliar. In Participatory Inquiry, the sense making involves an interweaving of sensibilities, things, meaning and relationships that are constituted by, and brought into play in, the contingent, dynamic and emergent flow of an inquiry process (Heape 2007/ Sprödt & Heape 2014). Significantly, Participatory Inquiry is fundamentally about exploring potentials and discovering new possibilities, unlocking creativity and innovating.

Participatory Inquiry brings design processes, methods, tools and interventions into play. In this regard, Kimbell (2012)usefully presents a dual practice-centred view of design "as-practice" and "in-practice". The perspective of 'design-as-practice' highlights that design is "a situated and distributed unfolding in which a number of people, and their knowing, doing, and saying, and a number of things, are implicated" (2012:135); and the perspective of design-in-practice draws attention to the "emergent nature of design outcomes as they are enacted in practice" (2012:136). Notably, the designer is not the sole, nor even the central, agent in designing; the 'final' design is continually reinvented in its ongoing practical application by users, a singular, fixed design 'solution' is utterly impossible (Kimbell 2012) - there simply is no single 'right' solution, a theme that very much reflects the essence of the "wicked problems" (Rittel & Webber 1973) confronting tourism practice and policy, and is a perspective that reflects the co-creation of tourism services in practice.

Participatory Inquiry process interweaves the *knowing*, *doing*, *making* and *relating* in the emergent process of an unfolding inquiry (Sprödt & Heape 2014).The '*knowing*' of participatory inquiry highlights the embodied, situated and interactive character of knowledge: knowledge and knowing cannot be divorced from the knower, or the context in which it is applied - as Schön (1995:31) relates, "knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action….our knowledge is in our action" – action reveals the knowledge of the practitioner and highlights the ability to generate new knowledge.

The embodied and situated character of knowledge points to the importance of '*doing*' in the articulation and development of new knowledge. Schön (1995) refers to the work of John Dewey, for whom inquiry concerns exploration of problematic situations through iterations of thought and action. Thus, according to Schön (1995:31)practice should be seen "as a setting not only for the application of knowledge but for its generation". As Kjaersgaard (2012)highlights, people express their embodied knowledge in their everyday practice and these practical expressions of knowledge enable new knowledge to emerge - so practitioners are "innovators solving everyday problems through situated innovations" (2012:341).

Participatory Inquiry is about '*making*' and '*relating*'.

Kimbell's(2011/ 2012) orientation to design practice "opens up the roles that other human and non-human actors play in constituting design activity" (2012:141), thus highlighting the relational aspect of design in all the human and physical aspects of the situated inquiry. Similarly, Heape (2013) views design as the ongoing construction and negotiation of meaning with the both the human and inhuman materials of the design situation –new insights may arise from interactions between people, and between people and things.

Consequently, the*Making* of Participatory Inquiry presents as a means of exploring concepts to discover design potentials. Design can be seen as a reflective conversation with the materials of a design situation(Schön 1990), sketching can be seen as an exploration process (Buxton 2001); physical materials may be seen as "things-to-think-with" (Brandt 2007), tangible and visual ethnographic materials can provoke empathy and elicit creativity (Buur & Oinonen 2011/ Ylirisku & Buur 2007). The social use of tangible materials can stimulate the creativity that foments innovation (Lucero et al. 2012). Thus 'making' presents as a way to explore possibilities and uncover new ideas, or put another way, to be creative and innovate.

The *relating* also occurs among people, who are engaged in the social process of dialogue and sense-making (Heape 2013/ Schön 1990). As Schön (1990:112) relates, design is "usually a social process". The different parties to the inquiryeach bring different knowledge resources to the process, and their differences also leverage the creative potential of variations of interpretation.AsSprödt and Heape (2014:6) relate, the sociality of an inquiry is a vital wellspring of insight: a "shared imagination" arises from the "weaving together of divergent views of participants in the social interaction of participatory inquiry". New ideas can certainly emerge when conflicting points of view are allowed to surface in the relating between those involved in processes of innovation (Buur & Larsen 2010a/ 2010b/ Buur & Matthews 2008); in fact, "clashes of horizons of imagination…[can] provide the creative tensions that fuel innovation" (Buur & Matthews 2008:270). Thus 'relating' contributes a new synthesis that is greater than the sum of the parts and drives innovation(Heape 2013).

The logic of Participatory Inquiry applies to any situated social endeavour attempting to explore possibilities for innovation, be they manifested in new concepts, ideas, processes or products. Accordingly, Participatory Inquiry process presents a potential means to unlock creativity and innovation in tourism policy and practice.However, the implementation of a novel process necessarily presents as a significant challenge to established rational ways.

Testing Participatory Inquiry in Tourism Innovation Practice

Student engagement in industry projects may provide an entry point for the experimental application of Participatory Inquiry in industry projects, facilitating industry exploration of this novel path to innovation. Here, Participatory Inquiry may occur as a collaborative, project oriented task and practice-based process of inquiry, driven by action research that engages students andindustry in a co-generative and co-learning research endeavour(Sprödt & Heape 2014).

Practical industry innovation projects may allow students to pursue aninnovation inquiry by moving from experiment to experiment as they open up and explore a range of perspectives on that inquiry. In the process students can engage, direct and critically reflect on their learning and on the social dimensions of working with others as they navigate the highly contingent, dynamic and emergent flux of the innovation project.

From an educational perspective, although the method is quite distinct from traditional classroom teaching, the two are related insofar as classroom learning adds to the personal resources of the students and so assists to inform their interaction with the field of inquiry. AsSprödt and Heape (2014:7) point out, this type of inquiry-based learning is not intended to replace more traditional, lecture-based learning; instead, it enables learners to bring theory acquired through more traditional lecturing or analysis based learning into play with the theory and skills they discover through their own practice. Thus, the two forms of learning should be seen as complements, rather than as substitutes; methods that build on one-another to enrich educational outcomes.

Conclusion

The application of Participatory Inquiry methods in student education projects provides an opportunity to introduce students to the method, and to test Participatory Inquiry as a route to enterprise innovation in tourism practice. The application of design-inspired methods such as Participatory Inquiry, present a promising new direction for research to examine how to stimulate innovation in tourism, and ultimately inform education to suitably equip students for future roles in tourism policy and practice. Such capability is necessary if tourism is to evolve suitably, and develop sustainably, in the complex social world of its practice.

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