

December 2020

Founding Father: Dr. Abraham Pizam in Conversation with Dr. Robertico Croes and Dr. Alan Fyall

Abraham Pizam
Abraham.Pizam@ucf.edu

Robertico Croes
Rosen College of Hospitality Management, University of Central Florida, robertico.croes@ucf.edu

Alan Fyall
University of Central Florida, alan.fyall@ucf.edu

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Recommended Citation

Pizam, Abraham; Croes, Robertico; and Fyall, Alan (2020) "Founding Father: Dr. Abraham Pizam in Conversation with Dr. Robertico Croes and Dr. Alan Fyall," *Rosen Research Review*. Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 8. Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/rosen-research-review/vol2/iss1/8>

Founding father

Dr. Abraham Pizam in conversation with Dr. Robertico Croes and Dr. Alan Fyall



Rosen College has developed and grown since its founding.



Dr. Abraham Pizam, founding Dean of Rosen College.

Fifty years ago, Dr. Abraham Pizam, founding Dean of the Rosen College of Hospitality Management, defended his dissertation entitled “Bringing something new into existence or use, through an industrial suggestion system.” To honor Dr. Abraham Pizam, the Rosen College Dean’s Distinguished Lecture Series centers on examining the evolution of the hospitality and tourism industry through the eyes of some of the pioneers in this field of education. We took advantage of this occasion to talk to Dean Pizam about his evolution as a scholar.

YOU DEFENDED YOUR DISSERTATION FIFTY YEARS AGO. YOU ARE ONE OF THE PIONEERS IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY RESEARCH. CAN YOU TAKE US FIFTY YEARS BACK AND SHARE WITH US HOW TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY RESEARCH WAS THEN? WHAT WERE THE TOPICS OF INTEREST?

Fifty years ago, tourism research was in its infancy and in hospitality management empirical research was practically non-existent. In the tourism domain, most empirical research was done by economists who were using quantitative methods to estimate the contribution of tourism to the economy and suggesting that tourism

was a “gold mine”, while sociologists or anthropologists studied it with qualitative methods and concluded that it was a sort of “devil incarnate”, whose costs outweighed its benefits.

Books like *The Golden Hordes* by Turner and Ash and *Tourism: Blessing or Blight* by George Young started attracting the attentions of novice researchers from other disciplines. Many of the sociological studies conducted in those years were of a descriptive nature rather than inferential and dealt mainly with the negative impacts of tourism on communities. The few studies that were conducted in the hospitality domain were mostly case studies in the

hotel industry. Data analyses in all fields of study – not just tourism or hospitality – were conducted on large mainframe computers that were the size of an average bedroom. Data input and programming was done on 80-column IBM punch cards. To be able to communicate with the mainframe computer, one had to learn a computer language such as Fortran IV, the long-forgotten one that I learned.

During my dissertation work, I spent many nights in the computer center that was open 24-7 because of the high demand for its services during daytime. None of the faculty members or graduate students that I met in the computer center were from the Cornell School of Hotel Administration. When inquiring about this strange phenomenon, I was told by my Business School professors and Ph.D. student-colleagues, that faculty members in the hotel school were mostly ex-hotel executives who retired into teaching and were not interested in conducting empirical research.



Dr. Pizam is a fierce supporter of collaborative research.

HAVE CLEARLY BEEN ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO YOU OVER THE YEARS. HOW HAS SCHOLARSHIP EVOLVED OVER THE PAST 30-40 YEARS IN THESE AREAS AND WHAT LESSONS HAVE THE ACADEMIC AND INDUSTRY COMMUNITIES LEARNED? IN LIGHT OF COVID-19 AND THE CURRENT CHALLENGES FACING THE GLOBAL INDUSTRY, HOW HAS SCHOLARSHIP CONTRIBUTED TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE PANDEMIC AND ITS IMPACT(S) ON TOURISM GLOBALLY?

When I started doing research in this field of study, there were only a handful of tourism scholars interested in the topic. Having spent my childhood and early adulthood in Israel and experienced frequent acts of terrorism, I realized the importance of security to tourist destinations. Therefore, my interest was driven by personal experience rather than a fear that this might happen in other places such as USA or Europe. However, the academic interest in tourism security drastically changed after 9/11 when terrorism became a major global threat.

At present, there are hundreds of articles and books written about issues of security. There are also a number of scholars who devote their entire academic careers to this subject. Unfortunately, the same evolution occurred in the field of safety and especially

LET'S JUMP FIFTY YEARS INTO THE FUTURE TO COME BACK TO THE PRESENT. WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED OVER THE LAST FIFTY YEARS?

WOW!!! How can I put this into a simple and succinct answer? To me, it is not just a matter of time, but also a matter of space. I feel like I am on a different planet. Professionally, everything has changed for me, my field of study, career path, culture, country and especially my zest for discovery. When I completed my Ph.D. degree, I thought that research was something that an academic MUST do to be able to be tenured and promoted. One had to do it but not necessarily love it.

Today, I know better and strongly believe that to be successful in research one has to love it and, most importantly, have a potful of curiosity supplemented by creativity and hard work. I also learned that successful academics cannot rest on their laurels and keep doing the same things, again and again. One has to grow and advance in knowledge, skills and values.

The cumulative knowledge that I possess today was not only acquired from my teachers, but mostly from my colleagues and students. Thus, the ancient quote from the Talmud, "I learned much from my teachers, more from my colleagues and the most from my students" is my living testament to what I am today. I also learned the value of collaboration and understood that one cannot do everything by him/herself. Collaboration with multiple colleagues from various disciplines does not dilute or minimize one's scientific contributions but opens one's eyes to new vistas and ultimately enriches the contribution to knowledge.

SOME OF YOUR EARLY STUDIES FOCUSED ON THE SOCIAL COSTS OF TOURISM TO COMMUNITIES RESIDING IN TOURIST DESTINATIONS. WITH THE PHENOMENON OF "OVERTOURISM" IN MORE RECENT YEARS, WHAT LESSONS, IF ANY, HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT THE SOCIAL COSTS OF TOURISM AND THE MEANS BY WHICH DESTINATIONS CAN BE MANAGED MORE SUSTAINABLY TO THE BENEFIT OF BOTH TOURISTS AND RESIDENTS?

I learned that the world is not dichotomous and that things are not either right or wrong. In many cases, the truth lies in between. That means that tourism by its nature is neither always good nor bad for local communities and their residents. I also learned that there is no universal equation for computing the "carrying capacity" of a destination. What

Today, I strongly believe that to be successful in research one has to love it and, most importantly, have a potful of curiosity supplemented by creativity and hard work.

might be "overtourism" for one destination may be "good and desirable" for another destination of the same size and capacity. What makes the difference is how tourism is managed within the destination and the "say" that local residents have in its planning and development.

SECURITY AND SAFETY AND THEIR VARYING IMPACTS ON TOURISM AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

health-related safety and its impacts on the hospitality and tourism industries. The SARS pandemic was the first global health-related incident that ignited a keen interest in conducting research on this topic. This was followed by a few studies on the Ebola epidemic and the foot and mouth outbreak. However, the interest in this topic diminished after those diseases were conquered and very few – if any – studies were conducted on this topic.

Thought Leader

This situation drastically changed with the appearance of the COVID-19 virus and the devastating effects it had on tourism and hospitality industries worldwide. I am currently serving as a guest editor of a special issue on "The Impacts of COVID-19 on the Global Hospitality Industry" that will be published by the *International Journal of Hospitality Management*. This issue has received over 600 manuscripts, the majority of which were empirical studies conducted throughout the world. This shows that the interest in health-related safety issues and their impacts on the tourism and hospitality industries has catapulted almost overnight.

SOME PEOPLE SAY THAT WE AS RESEARCHERS SHOULD BE CONVEYORS OF KNOWLEDGE. DO YOU AGREE? WHAT DO YOU THINK OUR ROLE IS AS RESEARCHERS IN THIS FIELD?



COVID-19 has had a profound global impact.

I believe that researchers have multiple roles. They are, first and foremost, generators of knowledge: they are the ones who design and conduct research that ultimately leads to the expansion of knowledge. Second, they are also conveyors of knowledge since they have the responsibility of communicating the results of their studies to other researchers and the public at large. Last, but not least, I also believe that in some cases, researchers should not only study, analyze and draw conclusions but also, when appropriate, take necessary action. This is what in social science is called "action research."

YOU HAVE ALWAYS HAD AN INTEREST IN CROSS-CULTURAL STUDIES AND CROSS-CULTURAL TOURIST BEHAVIOR. WHO WOULD YOU IDENTIFY AS YOUR MAJOR ACADEMIC INFLUENCES AND HOW HAVE THEIR STUDIES SHAPED YOUR THINKING?

The scholar who influenced my view of cross-cultural behavior is Geert Hofstede who developed the Cultural Dimensions Theory. His theory stood the test of time and was used in thousands of studies in all fields of



Dr. Pizam highlights how interest in health-related safety issues "has catapulted almost overnight" as a result.

social science and business administration. But I was also influenced by Henry A. Murray and Clyde Kluckhohn who suggested that "Every man is in certain respects like all men, like some men and like no other man." This saying, in my opinion, captures the scientific essence of anatomy, biology, sociology and psychology. But most importantly, it can be applied to tourism and hospitality by substituting the words "men" and "man" with "tourists" and "tourist," respectively.

THEORY DEVELOPMENT IN HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM HAS ALWAYS BEEN A THORN OF CONTENTION AMONG THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY. HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE GROWTH OF THEORY DEVELOPMENT IN HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM OVER THE PAST FEW DECADES AND HOW DO YOU ENVISION IT DEVELOPING IN THE LONGER TERM?

I think that the fields of hospitality and tourism have matured in the last few decades and reached the stage of development of theories that are applicable to other fields of study, such as service management and healthcare. The proof of this is in the numerous multi-disciplinary studies that are currently conducted by hospitality and tourism researchers with physicians, engineers, sociologists, psychologists, arts and humanities specialists, etc. This would have never happened fifty years ago.

ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS, WE HAVE HEARD YOU SAY THAT WE ARE NOT RESPECTED AS RESEARCHERS. WHY DO YOU HAVE THAT OPINION? DOES THAT OPINION PUT US IN A CONFIDENCE TRAP?

That was then but now it is no longer the case. We used to be the Rodney Dangerfield [a Hollywood actor whose main shtick was "I got no respect"] of the academic community. Now we are the Aretha Franklin whose main song is Respect. Was I hurt and offended when I realized what other academics were thinking and saying about us? You bet I was, but instead of protesting in a loud voice, I and my colleagues "took the high road" and continued to do research and publications to prove to the others that we were as good as them.

ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS WE HAVE HEARD YOU TALKING ABOUT THE ROLE OF HOSPITALITY EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIP AS CENTERED ON JOB CREATION. IS THAT NOT A NARROW VIEW OF OUR ROLE AS RESEARCHERS AND TEACHERS? DOES TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY HAVE A LARGER ROLE IN SOCIETY? WHAT IS THAT ROLE?

As hospitality and tourism faculty members, we have multiple roles. As teachers, we have the role of preparing our students for successful managerial careers in the hospitality and tourism industries. As scholars, we have the role of generating and diffusing new knowledge. Last, but not least, as academic members of the hospitality and tourism industries and community citizens, we have the role of contributing to the betterment of life for the industry's employees and citizens in our communities. I would dare to say that we are doing a good job in fulfilling our roles as teachers and scholars. We are also doing a decent job in contributing to the betterment of our practitioner colleagues in the hospitality and tourism industries. However, when it comes to fulfilling our role as citizens in our communities and society, I believe that we can do much better.

THE MAIN CRITICISM IN THE PAST FEW YEARS ABOUT OUR RESEARCH IS THAT IT IS DIVORCED FROM PRACTICAL UTILITY. THAT TENSION BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE IS GROWING. DO YOU THINK THAT THIS TENSION IS GOOD OR BAD FOR OUR FIELD?

I do not share the opinion that theoretical research has no practical applications. I constantly share with my Ph.D. students Kurt Lewin's (the father of Social Psychology) famous quote: "There's nothing so practical as good theory" because good theory guides effective action by turning knowledge into wisdom. Therefore, our problem is not that we study the wrong things, but that we fail to communicate the results of our studies to industry professionals in plain English and without using academic jargon. That needs to change, and I am delighted to see that this publication is doing it.

YOUR PASSION FOR EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIP SERVED AS

THE FOUNDATIONS FOR THE BIRTH AND EARLY-YEARS DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESS OF THE ROSEN COLLEGE. NOW THAT THE COLLEGE IS IN ITS "TEENAGE" YEARS AND FAST APPROACHING EARLY ADULTHOOD, WHERE DO YOU SEE THE ACADEMIC FUTURE OF THE COLLEGE AND ITS CONTRIBUTION, LOCALLY, NATIONALLY AND MAYBE INTERNATIONALLY TO ACADEMIA AND INDUSTRY?

I believe that the lyrics of the classic Virginia Slims cigarettes commercial – "You've come a long way baby" – are applicable to the status of Rosen College today. Though our chronological age puts us in the category of "teenagers," our intellectual, psychological and social age, place us in the category of "adults." As I have said numerous times during the last few years, we at Rosen College are not sitting on our glorified

We at Rosen College are not ... waiting for the future to arrive. We are creating the future, right here, right now.

behinds and waiting for the future to arrive. We are creating the future, right here, right now. This future is the exportation of our hospitality culture to all other industries that have a service component. That, in my opinion, will be the new and sought after "Good Hospitality Seal of Approval."

FINALLY, HOW DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD REACH OUT TO THE INDUSTRY AND SOCIETY AT LARGE? WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE INCENTIVES THAT GUIDE OUR RESEARCHERS' BEHAVIOR? HOW SHOULD WE COMMUNICATE OUR RESEARCH?

It is my strong opinion that like corporations, academic institutions must have a social responsibility component. This component called ASR (Academic Social Responsibility) should not only be taught in our classes but practiced through the daily life of our faculty. The answer to the question of "why isn't this happening?" lies in the incentive system that diminishes the contribution of faculty members to ASR to a maximum of 10% in the annual faculty



Dr. Abraham Pizam

Linda Chapin Eminent Scholar Chair in Tourism Management

W: <https://hospitality.ucf.edu/person/dr-abraham-pizam/>

assessment. This sends the message to everyone that contribution to the college or university ASR is not that important.

Interview conducted by Dr. Robertico Croes, Associate Dean, Research & Administration at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management & Director, Dick Pope Sr. Institute for Tourism Studies, and Dr. Alan Fyall, Associate Dean, Academic Affairs at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management & Visit Orlando Endowed Chair of Tourism Marketing.



Dr. Robertico Croes



Dr. Alan Fyall