Sustainability and integration – the principal challenges to tourism and tourism research

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Sustainability and Integration - The Principal Challenges to Tourism and Tourism Research

Abstract

What are the biggest challenges facing tourism and tourism research? This paper answers this question by canvassing the opinions of recognised experts in the field. The analysis is based on 30 interviews with fellows of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism. Two key thematic issues were identified. First, the pragmatic issue of how to operationalise sustainability and its various sub-elements, such as climate change, overtourism and tourisation to ensure the long term future of tourism. Second, the need for further integration between disciplines within the tourism field, between tourism and other fields, and between research and practice.

1. Introduction

Twenty years ago, Echtner and Jamal (1997) and Gibson (1998) commented that tourism was a fragmented activity typified by multiple communities of discourse with little cross fertilization between them. Little seems to have changed in the intervening 20 years as both Benckendorff and Zehrer (2013) and Laws and Scott (2015) have made similar observations more recently. Indeed, the growth of tourism as a scholarly field of study, accompanied by the exponential growth in tourism journals seems to have muddied, rather than clarified the situation. As a result, much tourism scholarship is still dominated by research locked within disciplinary silos, in spite of calls for a more integrated approaches (Bramwell et al. 2017; Cockburn-Wootten et al. 2018). Moreover,

because of this 'siloization', there seems to be little consensus as to the key issues facing the sector and the academic field.

It is no wonder, then, that a number of academics (e.g. Coles, Fenclova, and Dinan 2013; Edwards, Griffin, and Hayllar 2008; Lehman, Wickham, and Fillis 2014; Shaw and Williams 2009) and industry bodies (Williams, Stewart, and Larsen 2012) have proposed various research agendas. These efforts, though, often have an inbuilt bias, where agendas identified by academics tend to be field specific, as in the case of calls for sports (Weed 2014), urban (Edwards, Griffin, and Hayllar 2008) or gender research (Pritchard 2018), while those from industry bodies reflect the interests of their members (Williams, Stewart & Larsen 2012). Another body of research has sought to identify core research issues through review papers that aim to locate gaps in the literature (Coles, Fenclova, and Dinan 2013; Reinhold, Zach, and Krizaj 2017). Whether a research gap equals an actual challenge that should be overcome remains a point of discussion, but it may be argued that this is not always the case.

Together, these observations suggest a need to draw attention to the core challenges facing the field, regardless of an individual's own disciplinary focus or research bias. This study aims to do so through thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with Fellows of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism (the Academy). These fellows are recognised experts in the field, who come from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and who have many years' experience observing, teaching and researching tourism in a global context. By canvassing the opinions of these experts from a variation of disciplinary backgrounds and geographies, the purpose of the study is to search beyond discipline specific issues to determine if broad consensus exists across disciplines as to the core issues facing tourism. The findings may inspire researchers to focus on these key issues and fuel academic discussion about the core challenges facing the field.

2. International Academy for the Study of Tourism

The International Academy for the Study of Tourism is an international organization created to enhance both theoretical and practical research in the field of tourism. Its goals are to further the scholarly research and professional investigation of tourism by encouraging the application of tourism research findings and advancing the international diffusion and exchange of knowledge about tourism ('International Academy for the Study of Tourism' n.d.). The Academy was founded in June, 1988 in Santander, Spain (Butler and Wall 1988), when 44 leading scholars from 18 countries were invited to attend. The idea for the Academy was initiated by Professor Jafar Jafari who felt there was a need to establish an organisation of leading academics who were committed to the advancement of the conceptual knowledge base in the tourism field. In doing so, he felt that tourism could shed its image as an applied technical field taught at an operational level and move toward the journey of identification (Jafari 2007).

The Academy is a member based organisation with membership limited to 75 active Fellows, as well as Fellows Emeritus/a. Potential fellows must have made an outstanding scholarly contribution to the field of tourism. To be elected, they must be nominated, submit a dossier, make a presentation at the biennial meeting and then have their nominations supported by members. Membership is for life. Although fellows who are no longer active in the field can transfer their status to Emeritus/a Fellow. The somewhat conservative predilection of the nomination process has a number of advantages and disadvantages. When it was first formed, most members came from a social science background, with most working in the areas of sociology, anthropology and geography. This concentration reflected the origins of the field of study. As tourism studies evolved and became embedded in business and management faculties, the member profile has changed. Today, about half of members are affiliated with management, marketing or business oriented schools/departments, even though their doctoral studies were largely in departments other than

formal business programmes (Ateljević 2014). At the time of writing members were based in 22 economies and originated in 26 different countries/economies. Their areas of interests cover most of the work undertaken in the field. They include such foundation disciplines as anthropology, sociology, economics, geography, business studies, psychology and leisure and recreation studies, as well as emerging areas of interest ranging from mobility's, through gender studies, culture, history and the like.

3. Method

The authors wanted a broad representation of experienced and recognised scholars to be included for interview. The bi-annual conference of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism was seen as the ideal (perhaps only) place to meet and interview such a group of scholars face to face. Video interviews were conducted with 30 members of the Academy who attended its biannual conference in Guangzhou, China in May, 2017. Thus around half of the Academy members were included for interview, this was enough to reach data saturation. Convenience sampling was applied as members were included for interview on a voluntary basis. Table 1 shows the profile of interviewees by location of current affiliation, nationality and field of study/research interest. The sample included 26 men and four women, which reflects the gender composition of the Academy. Fellows ranged from their early 40s to early 80s. The fact that the study includes only members of the Academy may be seen as a limitation. Especially because characteristics of the Academy membership for example in terms of age, gender composition and lacking representation of non-western scholars are reflected in the study sample. The authors recognise this as a limitation of the paper, but saw no other possibilities to engage a similar number of scholars of this calibre. They also noted that despite the lack of representation in some aspects, the scholars come from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and represent more than 25 different countries/economies in all parts of the world.

The interviews were conducted as part of a project to develop a series of profile videos of members who could talk about their own fields of study and their contributions to the development of tourism. Each interview lasted between 15 and 45 minutes. A semi-structured format was adopted where interviewees were asked to introduce themselves, comment on their backgrounds and contributions to tourism. The last set of questions focussed on current and future challenges facing tourism and tourism academia. This part of the conversation was initiated with the question: "Based on your experience in the tourism field, what do you think is the biggest challenge to tourism and tourism research going forward?" Permissions were sought from each of the interviewees whose direct quotations are included in this paper. Grammatical and minor content changes have been made to the quotations in accordance with the person quoted to improve readability.

The relevant sections of the interviews were transcribed. A manual thematic analysis of the transcriptions was conducted. Through an inductive process, challenges were located and categorised, then evaluated and re-evaluated in relation to the other themes. Through this process the key themes and sub-themes emerged. The following section presents and discusses these themes categorised under the two major challenges/themes that emerged. Below each quotation a link is provided, which will direct the reader to a video version of the quote, most of the videos provide extra information and context to the written quotation.

[Table 1: Interviewee profiles]

4. Two Main challenges identified

The interviewees identified a range of tourism challenges and issues that reflected their own disciplinary background. These issues included for example, changing consumer preferences, safety

and security, social changes, how to bridge the gap between "the west and rest" (including dissemination of knowledge produced in non-English speaking countries) as well as concerns about dominance of some methodological approaches that may be constraining the field. However, despite the diversity of challenges mentioned, two issues were raised consistently, regardless of the person's location, academic background or area of research interest. One issue, sustainability, including specific sub issues, emerged as the dominant practical and operational challenge facing tourism as a whole. The second issue, working towards a more integrated approach to the study of tourism, was the common academic issue identified. Each of these will be discussed below.

4.1. Issue 1 - Sustainability

The issue of sustainability in general and climate change in particular have attracted much attention over the last 30 years, since the Bruntland report "Our Common Future" was first published. Over the intervening years, research has focussed from early idealistic assumptions that tourism could be a symbol of sustainable development to a recognition that despite good intentions, the continuous growth of the industry and lack of implementation of environmentally friendly operations on a global scale means that tourism is inherently unsustainable (Gössling et al. 2012; Cooper, Ruhanen, and Scott 2015). According to Butler (2015), this is even the case for what is regarded as sustainable tourism, because the efforts are made in the wrong places. As an example, he notes that the focus in greenhouse gas emission reduction for tourism tends to be on activities such as development of eco-lodges. But while the impact of building such lodges will be undetectably small, little emphasis is put on the things that actually makes a difference, such as reducing emissions in the established sector – reducing the total emissions of a major destination like Las Vegas by even 10% would for example have a significant effect (Butler 2015). This paradox of tourism sustainability – that even sustainable tourism is inherently unsustainable – is the foundation for a number of challenges related to tourism sustainability that the interviewed experts identified.

Two dominant, but closely interrelated, thematic domains and 13 sub themes emerged from analysis of the opinions of the respondents (Table 2). The first thematic domain relates specifically to the role of tourism in broader issues of ecological impacts and climate change. The second relates to the more tourism specific sustainability issues of touristisation and overtourism. Each of these are discussed below.

[Table 2: Thematic domains and sub themes relating to sustainable tourism issues]

Sustainability: Ecological impacts and Climate Change

As mentioned, the foundational challenge in relation to tourism sustainability is the fact that tourism is an inherently unsustainable practice and that the tourism industry is a major contributor to the world's carbon emissions. This basic issue was also highlighted by the interviewees. Simmons for example commented:

"the issue is that tourism is really consumptive of one of the world's scarcest

resources - clean air. From where I sit on the globe [New Zealand], we use more

energy, and in doing so, create more greenhouse gas emissions per million dollar

value added to our economy, than does agriculture. (…) I will be one of the few

people who have seen tourism volumes increase tenfold in their working life (…)

the volume we have now is about our fourth largest city, so it has urbanized New

Zealand with another fairly major city, but those people maybe have higher

consumption patterns, they have different use of water, different use of energy"

(Simmons)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/A7yMl_nuRIQ]

The obvious response to this challenge is to slow down tourism development. However, the issue is complicated by the fact that large parts of the world, especially in poorer areas, are becoming increasingly dependent on tourism as a primary source of income and as a means for development. Simmons continues:

"around the equator, we have the world's 49 poorest countries. 46 of those, the

great majority, rely on tourism as their number one foreign exchange earner. So,

the statement is that we just cannot get hold of the world's aviation gas tap and

pull it shut. (...) tourism has moved from being something of a bit of sideshow to

actually one of the key developmental thrusts (...) I think that requires a different

set of thinking and a different set of global governance than we currently have"

(Simmons)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/RZIpcGQYN6M]

If tourism development cannot be stopped it is necessary to question how practitioners, politicians and researchers can approach tourism development in a more holistic way. This entails a shift or expansion of focus, from the positive (often-economic) impacts of tourism, to the more negative (social and environmental) impacts. Talking about his own research, which has focussed on branding, Gartner supports this notion as he argues:

"we cannot simply go on talking about destination branding without talking

about the other aspects of destination impacts. Here I mean environmental

impacts, socio-cultural impacts. Because branding as a concept has primarily

been used as a business - economic concept, but it ignores what tourists bring to

an area outside of the money. In the future, we have to take a more holistic view

of these things and look at the detraction, if there is a detraction, from the

environmental side or from the socio-cultural side - some negative impacts."

(Gartner)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/kZ7-gwL_hYQ]

A second issue relating to sustainability, ecological impacts and climate change is how it may affect tourism destinations and in turn tourism businesses and communities that rely on tourism as a primary source of income. These issues relate to access that tourists may or may not have to certain destinations, the experiences that they may or may not have in those destinations, and to the survival of certain tourism destinations:

> *"of course the elephant in the room is what is going to happen with climate*
>
> *change and environmental deterioration and how that is going to affect the ability*
>
> *to travel to certain destinations, the ability of certain destinations to survive and*
>
> *the experience people are going to have in certain destinations." (McKercher)*

[Video link: https://youtu.be/-VPztTVPZWM]

Fesenmaier gives an example of such an issue, based on his own home state of Florida, USA:

> *"We have 1100 miles of coastal zone that is under huge stress (...) most of the*
>
> *population live on the edge within 10 miles of the ocean. What kind of incredible*
>
> *impact over the next 35 years you guys [the younger generation] will face and*
>
> *have to address those challenges. It's exciting, but also hugely threatening to*
>
> *me." (Fesenmaier)*

[Video link: https://youtu.be/GEm_Pr1j33k]

Gill argues that many good things are said about the fight against climate change and for a more sustainable tourism industry, but that action has been lacking:

"how do you take notions of sustainability and actually operationalize them,

getting it from an idea to practice (...) it has largely failed. I think in Whistler,

where I have been working, there have been some successes, but it is two steps

forward, one step back. Maybe two steps back, you know, a snakes and ladders

sort of process." (Gill)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/1kAlKeI7ZnQ]

Along with other interviewees Gill emphasises the importance of governance and highlights how efforts so far have largely failed. According to Gill, a sign of this is society's and her own increasing focus on the concept of resilience:

"The challenge of understanding how to plan beyond the short term political and

economic frameworks, is a huge challenge. One of the things in my recent work

has been moving from talking about sustainability a lot, to talking about another,

I suppose buzzword; resilience. How do we build more resilient communities?

What is the best way to understand notions of resilience? It deals with slightly

shorter timeframes, so I think those are some of the challenges from a pragmatic

point of view and they certainly guide where research is going." (Gill)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/nkPLuVMOtR0]

The emergence of resilience as an important concept to supplement ideas about sustainability reflects a level of pragmatism and serves as an indication that researchers are increasingly accepting that it may be too late to stop the consequences of climate change. Thus, the emergence of the resilience concept as a supplement to sustainability measures indicates a pragmatic shift in research focus, based on the notion that if the tide cannot be stopped, one should start building boats.

The lack of successful governance and political action may be a reason for this shift; another reason is the lack of action from civil society, which was also highlighted by the interviewees:

"What [tourism researchers focussing on sustainability] have to cope with is the enormous challenge from the real world itself, in that people often act in their own self-interest. Progress in sustainability requires that people jump on-board the sustainability bus. (…) It is difficult to achieve the ideal outcomes of the sustainability principles." (Dwyer)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/YH28D58iMiw]

"The biggest challenge with climate change is that government can enact policy. Industry may do things from an economic perspective, to reduce costs, but right now we have got a billion international person trips a year and somewhere in the neighbourhood of six or seven billion domestic person trips. The challenge is, how you reach the individual tourist to have him or her change behaviour."

(McKercher)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/ZYZneJvjOS4]

The issues presented here brings into focus four paradoxes of tourism sustainability: (1) that even sustainable tourism is inherently unsustainable; (2) that tourism destinations and the business of tourism is simultaneously threatened by and contributing to climate change and environmental deterioration; (3) that the poorer parts of the world that are most vulnerable to climate change, are also most dependent on tourism as a foreign exchange earner; (4) that action is lacking from policymakers as well as citizens despite knowledge about the consequences of climate change. These four paradoxes raise questions about if and how tourism can become more sustainable, about how destinations may deal with climate change and the ensuing threats to incoming tourism, about how destinations in poorer countries can leapfrog to solutions that allow them to continue earning

tourism income without destroying local environments and about how to engage policymakers, consumers and citizens to make more sustainable decisions.

While the challenges and solutions presented so far may stem from and require solutions that go beyond tourism, sustainability challenges that relate more directly to tourism were also highlighted by a number of the interviewees. These challenges had to do with tourisation and overtourism.

Sustainability: Tourisation and Overtourism

With a few setbacks, domestic and international tourism has experienced sustained growth year on year since the 1950s (UNWTO 2017). This is partly due to a rise in standard of living in developing parts of the world, as this development has increased the number of people for whom travel and tourism is an option. Several of the interviewees mentioned China as a significant modern example of this. The rise in tourism numbers raise questions about how to sustainably manage the increasing numbers as well as fundamental questions about people's right to travel.

Simmons suggests that challenges related to overtourism and sustainability are getting to a point where we may be reaching "peak tourism":

> *"We see it in the outmigration of Chinese visitors, we see it in places like*
>
> *Yosemite National Park with 5,6 million visitors a year, or the Great Wall of*
>
> *China. To me one of the big questions is, are we approaching peak tourism?"*
>
> *(Simmons)*
>
> [Video link: https://youtu.be/Gc3qnHLM8IM]

Weaver agrees that the rising numbers present challenges, but he argues that despite efforts to control the number of tourists, there is no stopping the rise. He mentions two primary reasons for

this, which we have previously alluded to - the rising number of tourists from new markets and an

increasing dependency on tourism as an economic sector. Weaver dubs the increasing absolute and

relative presence and dependence on tourism-related phenomena tourisation (Weaver 2017):

"Tourism is only going to get bigger. We talk about things like climate change,

we talk about all sorts of factors that might reduce the flow of tourism but while it

may reduce the flow of tourism to one particular area, people will just go

somewhere else. People have the money and it is an innate human desire to travel

and more and more countries are getting on board - China being the classic

example. So we have to face this phenomenon of what I call tourisation. Global

tourisation now, where even very large countries are becoming more or less

dependent directly and indirectly on tourism. In more and more of the world's

landscape, tourism is really the dominant economic sector." *(Weaver)*

[Video link: https://youtu.be/Kxaq4onXLHk]

Becken and Gill argue that until recently the focus for companies, marketers, researchers and

governments has been solely on growth. Becken further argues that the answer to tourisation should

be a shift in focus from growth to balance:

"everything is about growth. At the expense often, of both the social and

environmental components. I think that is the big challenge. At the end of the day,

economics always seems to be the one that trumps everything else. That is a

challenge..." (Gill)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/bkrX4yfCHwo]

"We have moved from an era of tourism growth, where everyone wanted it and

governments have invested in marketing and attracting tourists, building

infrastructure. We are almost in this orbit where we do not even reflect anymore -

growth is the mantra. Now we are starting to see the problems and it is actually

very hard to stop all of a sudden. Because there is so much invested. It is like the

momentum has gained and now destinations all over the world, and there are

some absolute classic cases like Barcelona, Venice, places in New Zealand that

are overrun by tourists and you cannot all of a sudden say – we don't want it

anymore. Because communities depend, business cycles are locked in, so I think

the biggest challenge for tourism now, is to find a balance. How much tourism do

you want, how much can you manage. And if sometimes it is too much, how do

you actually stop it or reverse it?" (Becken)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/MAR0Q1MtNX4]

Challenges in finding this balance include how to hinder tourism influx without stopping it, how to qualify tourism influx instead of quantifying it and how to distribute tourists away from areas that are at capacity, towards those that have it:

"there are still areas in the world that are completely deprived [of tourism], think

many parts of Africa that are craving to get more tourists. So it is a problem of

balance. (...) How do you change the flows? But it is probably also a matter of

total volume, if you think about greenhouse gas emissions alone." (Becken)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/axTQL8ADiKI]

Finally, as also emphasised by Simmons and Weaver, there is a challenge of tourism dependency. On the one hand, in the sense that tourism has become a necessary tool for development in some parts of the world. On the other hand, in the sense that some destinations, which have come out of balance, have a hard time regaining it, because they have become dependent on tourism and therefore cannot enact effective change.

In addition to these challenges related to the growth and management of increasing tourism flows, there is a more fundamental question about travel as a human right. Aramberri discusses the difficulties in aligning the fundamental right to travel with the challenges of tourisation and overtourism:

> *"[The large number of tourists] is going to be the big problem of the future. How can we make that sustainable, in the sense that we cannot tell people 'you should not be travelling' and at the same time we have to make it possible that they do not destroy, not just the monuments themselves (…) but the experience of seeing them. (…) How do we avoid that these attractions are trivialised? I do not know, because there are only two ways in the market. Either you make it very difficult to access them [attractions] by giving a number of entries a day, that is what they do at the Forbidden City in Beijing. 80,000 entries a day and that is it. What happens then is that you have the scalpers, who sell the tickets in the black market. That is not the best way. The second way is to dramatically increase the price. And what are you then telling people who have no money – 'you have no right to travel, you have no right to experience the good places in the world' – we cannot do that!"*
>
> *(Aramberri)*

[Video link: https://youtu.be/YvVQAil_OTg]

Aramberri's comment reflects The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and UNWTO's Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, both of which promote the right to travel and the right to rest and leisure (Higgins-Desbiolles & Russell-Mundine, 2008). A right that may potentially be threatened in the near future, as tourism numbers grow, because, as pointed out by Aramberri, the obvious solutions will introduce new travel restrictions especially for the less privileged.

There is agreement among the interviewees that tourism is an unstoppable force, as it is both an innate desire, an indispensable source of income and a human right. The rise in living standards in some of the most populated parts of the world is another important contributor. Thus the main question that remains is how to manage tourism flows by refocussing from growth to balance.

4.2. Issue 2 - Integration – the main challenge to tourism research

Participants were also keen to talk about the challenges facing tourism as a field of study. A shared theme between most respondents who commented on these challenges revolved around different issues of integration. These issues fall within two overlapping thematic domains – integration between theory and practice, and dual siloing. An overview of these and their sub themes is provided in Table 3.

[Table 3: Thematic domains and sub themes relating to integration issues]

Integration: Between Theory and Practice

The call for further integration between theory and practice is not new to tourism scholarship. McCool et al. (2015) for example urged tourism researchers to "engage more with the industries, communities and institutions that embody the real tourism world" (p. 251). Despite this knowledge, it is evident from the interviews that integration between tourism theory and tourism practice is a primary concern for most of the interview participants, who agreed that this is the major challenge facing tourism research. Dimanche notes the connection between this challenge, and the challenges related to sustainability, which were discussed in the previous section:

> *"The challenges of tourism research are linked to the challenges that society is*
>
> *facing. So, I would say, it's about sustainability, it's about climate change, it's*
>
> *about a changing global environment (...) It is important to keep track of that, we*
>
> *are connected to a society, we are connected to a changing world and we really*

have to make sure that our research remains meaningful to those societal

changes." (Dimanche)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/1d_7jvnKt5Q]

Broadly, the task of integrating research with practice was mentioned in two different respects: researchers' (lack of) connection to the industry and the industry's lacking ability or willingness to take note of and implement research findings.

In relation to the challenge of researchers' lack of connection with the industry, some of the interviewees noted the importance of this connection and how it is particularly important for researchers in the tourism field:

"Nowadays with analytics, with big data, with the internet of things, there are a

many more tools to play with, there is a lot more data. But the importance of

integration has never gone away. (…) Let us not think that data drives everything.

Politics, power, these are things which determine critical decision making and

just having the data is not enough. My view is that it is necessary to connect with

that industry reality. Our future scholars, they should also do that. I think there is

a role for theory, but there is also an important role for application. The tourism

field has a profession, it has an industry and we as scholars should never lose

sight of that." (King)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/A6JNZl5C0YU]

The argument made by interviewees such as King is that the ultimate goal of research is to enact real world change – to society or to the industry. However, it is evident that current incentive systems have created a situation where research can be produced for the sake of research production. This is a challenge because it allows for, even rewards, research that does not have

potential to enact change to society or industry. This challenge is discussed further in the following section. King brings up the availability and abundance of data, as an example of a factor that have given more opportunities for research production without engagement of outside actors. Williams uses his own research approach to give an example of what he thinks is increasingly being lost, as research is progressively conducted as distanced deskwork, rather than as co-creation:

"Getting to know people [research subjects/industry partners] initially, really

understanding what the problem is from their perspective – what the issue is.

Saying: 'Here is an approach that I worked with, what do you think? How can we

build a tool that is going to make this work best for you?' And them saying 'we

are having problems collecting this information, can you help us get the widgets

to all line up, so we can do the work'. Producing the material and then talking to

them – what does it mean? That is a long process. It does not happen just at a

desk, it happens though interchange and co-creation, as opposed to being

isolated. And I do not think we do enough to try and encourage people to think

that way, and to act that way." (Williams)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/iGV7_FfNVQw]

It is not only researchers who willingly or unwillingly lose the connection with the outside world. The interviewees also explain how the integration challenge is reinforced by the fact that many practitioners are unwilling or unequipped to take advantage of the knowledge created through research. Thus research findings that might be highly relevant to certain practitioners are rarely noted nor implemented by the practitioners. A central question here is whose task it is to make sure that practitioners are made aware of and consequently implement research findings. One argument would be that the researcher's job is to create knowledge and make it available to those who may find it relevant or interesting. However, there are signs that in many such cases the knowledge will

never be discovered, nor used. The opposing argument would be that it is the researcher's job to make sure that research findings are available and decipherable to practitioners.

Integration: Avoiding silos

Despite multiple calls for more integrated approaches (Bramwell et al. 2017; Cockburn-Wootten et al. 2018), it is evident from the interviews that scholarship is affected by what may be considered as a dual siloisation issue: On the one hand internal silos limit discourse between areas in the tourism field, one the other hand external siloing limit connections between the tourism field and other fields of study.

As tourism research grows and develops as a subject of study, it becomes increasingly specified. According to the interviewees, this is a natural and necessary development, but it also leads to challenges:

> *"We have to be conscious when we conduct research at a very narrow, focused*
>
> *level, that it is all occurring as part of a whole and we need to have, always that*
>
> *holistic understanding of the role that tourism plays in society." (Dimanche)*
>
> [Video link: https://youtu.be/-1Nuo-n5auc]

> *"I think our future scholars, their research needs to have a kind of precision*
>
> *accuracy, so it needs to really get down to the micro level. But at the same time,*
>
> *the world is changing so fast and even the role of tourism in society, geopolitics,*
>
> *the role of tourism in climate change. (…) I think the challenge for the scholar is*
>
> *to be able to take the research at a meaningful level." (King)*
>
> [Video link: https://youtu.be/d8hZksCXKa0]

These quotes reflect a beginning silo-effect within the tourism field, where specified researchers forget to consider their research as part of a greater whole. This is a challenge, because it can result in research that, while highly specified, has little impact on society, and even on the field of tourism studies. Because it is not considered, nor presented as part of a bigger whole.

This problem may partly be due to another challenge, mentioned by some of the interviewees - the way universities valuate researchers' performance. Increasingly, this is based on the number of publications in certain journals, rather than the impacts of the research on a certain field or on society or industry. Researchers may thus be tempted to publish for the sake of scoring points, rather than for the sake of creating and disseminating knowledge. Some of the interviewed researchers spoke of this challenge, as brought on by the introduction of neoliberalism to the university world:

"Universities (...) they didn't respond very well to neoliberalism. They simply jumped to the government tunes (...) we ended up with a world of league tables, a world of having to publish, a world where teaching was constantly monitored"

(Airey)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/tFv_Iy8Ioyo]

The internal silo-effect created partly as a result of failed incentive systems present a major challenge to tourism research. So does the emerging external silo-effect for the tourism field as a whole:

"if you only read narrow tourism publications and only try to publish in them, I think then you become too inward looking, that is a danger facing the field right now." (Wall)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/Xp1ZA1vUxbc]

A number of interviewees explain that some level of siloing has been necessary to establish and separate the tourism field from other fields of research. However, this has had unintended consequences, as the field has now started to close around itself and become inward looking. Jafari explains the process:

"The way knowledge came to tourism - and this rather rapidly - was through its importation from other social science fields. But, soon after, we started recycling the same knowledge within the field we call tourism. So I quote you, you quote me, they quote us and we quote them - all within our field. And the trend was and still is, many scholars came and stayed in tourism and gradually reduced their engagements in their mother disciplines." (Jafari)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/RozlDWrwgLg]

The challenge for tourism research has thus turned from being the establishment of tourism as a legitimate field of study, to reintegration with other fields. Jafari continues, explaining that the main task is to export the knowledge, which has been created within the tourism field:

"our knowledge is not actively being exported to other fields. That is why they do not really understand who we are or what we are doing. The challenge is to export our knowledge afield, to say we have something to tell, how one can understand sociology through tourism, how one can understand culture through tourism, international relations through tourism. Instead of having special issues within our own field, we should have special issues in the journals of psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, among others" (Jafari)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/k-ehYeDO734]

In addition, this creates a danger that the field loses what used to be its main strength and potential – interdisciplinarity. Gravari-Barbas concludes:

"The main challenge today is to achieve, really, an interdisciplinarity. We have

been working for several years in isolated tracks. I think that tourism studies are

today, the most interesting and interconnected area to bring together

geographers, economists, managers, anthropologists or ethnologists, we do have

this chance to bring together all these different disciplines and create a new field

of study. (...) It can be achieved." (Gravari-Barbas)

[Video link: https://youtu.be/4oVY4Xx3dqQ]

5. Conclusion

This paper has presented a thematic analysis of interviews with 30 highly accomplished tourism researchers. We found that despite their diversity in fields of study, backgrounds and geography, the experts' opinions on the greatest challenge to tourism and tourism research respectively converged on two principal issues. Sustainability emerged as the dominant practical and operational issue, while integration on different levels was the greatest challenge to tourism research.

The task of making tourism sustainable has various dimensions, these are evident in the two dominant, but closely interrelated, thematic domains and 13 sub themes, which emerged from the thematic analysis of the interview data. The two thematic domains were: Sustainability, ecological impacts and climate change; and sustainability, tourisation and overtourism. The foundation of both issues is the inherent unsustainability of tourism, and following that, the increasing need to shift or expand the focus from positive (often-economical) impacts of tourism, to the more negative (social and environmental) impacts.

The challenges related to ecological impacts and climate change are summarised as four paradoxes: (1) that even sustainable tourism is inherently unsustainable; (2) that tourism destinations and the

business of tourism is simultaneously threated by and contributing to climate change and environmental deterioration; (3) that the poorer parts of the world that are most vulnerable to climate change, are also most dependent on tourism as a foreign exchange earner; (4) that action is lacking from policymakers, as well as citizens, despite knowledge about the consequences of climate change. These paradoxes raise questions that future tourism research should deal with, namely: if and how tourism can become more sustainable, how destinations may deal with climate change and the ensuing threats to incoming tourism, how destinations in poorer countries can leapfrog to solutions that allow them to continue earning tourism income without destroying local environments and how to engage policymakers, consumers and citizens to make more sustainable decisions.

Tourism is constantly growing and new tourist markets are emerging in countries that previously did not produce international tourists. This has created challenges of overtourism in certain destinations. At the same time, destinations around the world are increasingly dependent on tourism as a source of income. Combined, these developments create tourisation. A phenomenon which is accentuated by the fact that many consider freedom of movement, and thus travel and tourism as a human right. The challenges of overtourism and tourisation raises questions about how destinations may deal with increasing tourism influx and dependency that future research should grapple with. Some argue that the solution is reorientation from tourism growth to tourism balance. Challenges in finding this balance offers interesting questions that researcher should engage with including how to hinder tourism influx without stopping it, how to qualify tourism influx instead of quantifying it and how to distribute tourists away from areas that are at capacity, towards those that have it.

The convergence of the diverse group of scholars on issues that relate to sustainability is a testament to the importance of the sustainability challenge within tourism. At the same time, it may also be viewed as an indication of the multiplicity of the sustainability issue. It is evident from the interviews that the sustainability challenge contains a variety of issues within different disciplines and that also reach beyond tourism as an industry and as a concept. This complexity adds further challenges, but also offers avenues and incentives for tourism practitioners and researchers to collaborate with other industries and fields of research in finding solutions to these pressing issues.

On different levels, integration was found to be the biggest challenge to tourism research. Two thematic domains as well as four sub themes emerged in relation to this issue. The thematic domains were: Integration between theory and practice, and dual siloing.

In terms of integration between research and practice, two challenges appeared. First, a lack of willingness and incentives for researchers to engage with 'the real world' is a major challenge. This leads to an increasing production of research that is not relevant outside of academic circles. Second, lack of connection between research and industry presents a major challenge. On the one hand this challenge appears because researchers are not concerned with the dissemination and application of their own research as long as it counts towards institutional KPIs. On the other hand the issue emerged because of practitioners' unwillingness and/or inability to access, decipher and implement research findings into their practice. In terms of academic integration, two challenges relating to knowledge siloing appeared - an internal challenge and an external challenge. The internal challenge appears as the knowledge produced becomes increasingly specified and is not contextualised, since contextualisation of the knowledge produced is not incentivised. The external challenge appears as the academic field of tourism research has moved from a position where

establishment of the field was the major challenge, to a position where the major challenge is to reopen the field, and integrate the knowledge produced with knowledge produced in other fields of research.

The integration challenges will need to be solved on two levels, the individual and systemic level. Individual researchers will need to more actively engage with other fields of study as well as with society and industry. In doing so, knowledge dissemination on platforms other than traditional research papers will be key. On the systematic level, current incentive systems will have to be changed so engagement with other fields, industry and society is valued at least on the same level as papers published without context on the fringes of the tourism field.

Finally, it is important to note the connection between the principal challenge to tourism and to tourism research. It is evident that integration is necessary to deal with the sustainability challenges that lie ahead, as these challenges are not isolated to tourism as an industry or as a phenomenon. The sustainability challenges affect both other fields of research, the (tourism) industry, local communities and many other stakeholders. Based on the interviews, we suggest that the way forward is to consider the principal challenges of sustainability and integration as connected and to use the sustainability challenges as an outset to share knowledge, collaborate, and finally to enact real change to tourism, tourism research and beyond.

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No.	Name	Location of main affiliation	Nationality	Field of study/area of interest
1	Bill Gartner	USA	USA	Image, Second Homes, Development Economics, Development Integration
2	Alistair Morrison	Australia and UK China	UK, Canadian, Chinese resident	Hotel Operations and Consumer Behavior in Service Consumptions
3	Alison Gill	Canada	UK, Canada	Mountain resort planning and development, Community tourism planning, Amenity migration, Politics of place
4	Bob McKercher	Hong Kong	Canada, Australia, HK permanent resident	Professional practice, Time space movements, Market studies
5	Brian King	Hong Kong	Scotland, Australia, HK resident	Tourism planning in developing countries and island microstates, Resort operations, and Marketing
6	Christian Laesser	Switzerland	Swiss	Consumer behaviour, Tourism financing, Destination management, Service management in tourism and transport
7	Daniel Fesenmaier	USA	USA	Destination marketing, Information technology, Information search, Travel decision making, Travel demand modelling
8	David Weaver	Australia	Canada, Australia	Sustainable tourism, Ecotourism, Tourism area life cycle, Indigenous tourism, War and tourism, Geopolitics and tourism
9	David Airey	UK	UK	Tourism Policy, Tourism Education
10	David Simmons	New Zealand	New Zealand	Destination Governance, Planning and management, Tourism yield, Tourism impacts
11	Dimitrios Buhalis	UK	Greece, UK	eTourism, Strategic tourism marketing and management, Destination management, Consumer behaviour, Distribution channels, Sustainable development
12	Egon Smeral	Austria	Austrian	Tourism Impacts, Forecasting, Modelling, Policy
13	Frederic Dimanche	Canada	French, USA, Canadian resident	Hospitality management, Sustainable tourism, Tourism innovation, Destination image, Experiential Marketing, Destination Branding

14	Gang Li	UK	China, UK	Tourism forecasting, Economic analysis of tourism demand, Quantitative methods in tourism research
15	Geoffrey Wall	Canada	UK, Canada	Tourism impacts, Sustainable development, Planning, History, Heritage
16	Haiyan Song	Hong Kong	China, UK, HK permanent resident	Tourism demand modelling and forecasting; Impact assessment, Competition issues in tourism, Tourism supply chain management
17	Jafar Jafari	USA	Iran, USA, Spanish resident	Tourism and culture change, Host/guest interaction, Impacts on the developing countries, Anthropology of tourism, Education and training, Development, Tourist culture
18	Julio Aramberri	USA	Spain, Vietnam resident	Sociology of Destination Marketing
19	Karl Wober	Austria	Austria	Computer support in tourism and hospitality marketing and management, Strategic marketing and planning, Tourism statistics
20	Kaye Kye Sung Chon	Hong Kong	Korea, USA, HK permanent resident	Strategic management, Tourism industry marketing, Hospitality management, Convention tourism
21	Larry Dwyer	Australia	Australia	Economics of Tourism, Tourism Management
22	Maria Gravari-Barbas	France	France	Tourism, heritage, and development, Urban tourism, Urban redevelopment, Tourism and events
23	Metin Kozak	Turkey	Turkey	Consumer behaviour, Destination marketing and management, Benchmarking, Sustainable tourism
24	Muzzo Uysal	USA	Turkey, USA	Demand/supply interaction, Marketing and segmentation, Impact, International tourism
25	Nelson Graburn	USA	UK, USA	Tourism anthropology - Domestic Japan, Ethnic China, Canadian Inuit, Ethnic and tourists arts, museums, heritage, film
26	Noam Shoval	Israel	Israel	Advanced tracking technologies, GIS, Urban tourism, Time-space activity
27	Peter Williams	Canada	Canada	Tourism behaviour, Policy and planning, Product development, Destination development, Ski area management, Aboriginal tourism
28	Sara Dolnicar	Australia	Slovenia, Australia	Market segmentation methodology, Measurement in social science research

| 29 | Shiji Yamashita | Japan | Japan | Cultural Tourism, Heritage-tourism, Eco-tourism |
| 30 | Susan Becken | Australia | Germany, New Zealand, Australian resident | Sustainable tourism, Climate change |

[Table 2: Thematic domains and sub themes relating to sustainable tourism issues]

Thematic domain	Sub theme	Issue
Sustainability: Ecological impacts and climate change	Tourism's inherent unsustainability	- Even sustainable tourism is inherently unsustainable
	Tourism dependency	- Countries and destinations are increasingly dependent on tourism as a foreign exchange earner - This is particularly the case for poorer countries with less means to develop sustainably
	Holistic approach	- How to expand focus from positive to negative effects of tourism?
	Governance	- How to change from short term to long term thinking/planning?
	Destination survival	- Will some destinations not survive the effects of climate change? Some may be destroyed, others may become inaccessible
	Consumption/consumers	- Tourists have higher consumption patterns than locals - Tourists are selfish consumers who act in their own self interest - How to get consumers to change their behaviour?
	Operationalisation of sustainability measures	- Visions of sustainability have been difficult to operationalise - one step forward, two steps back
	Resilience	- Adaptation vs. reduction - It may be too late to stop climate change, the issue now is pragmatic adaptation to changes
Sustainability: Tourisation and Overtourism	'Peak Tourism'	- Are we reaching a point where tourism can no longer continue its constant growth?
	Emergence of new markets	- A significant contributor to the growth of tourism comes from the emergence of new markets
	Travel as an innate human desire	- It is questionable whether it is possible to stop tourism growth, since travel it is an innate human desire
	Travel as a human right	- How to limit/control/distribute tourism without hindering people's right to move around?
	Growth to balance	- Part of a more holistic tourism development process is to reorient from growth to balance

			- How to redirect tourism flows from destinations at capacity to destinations with capacity? - How to how to qualify tourism instead of quantifying it?

[Table 3: Thematic domains and sub themes relating to integration issues]

Thematic domain	Sub theme	Issue
Integration between theory and practice	Lack of connection between research and society	- There should be a clear link between broader societal issues and issues that tourism researchers deal with
	Lack of connection between research and industry	- Unlike other fields of research, the tourism field has an industry. Availability of data combined with current incentive systems makes it possible to avoid this connection - Many practitioners are not able to access or decipher the knowledge produced through tourism research
Dual Siloing	Internal siloing	- Research is often not contextualised within the field - Research is becoming specific to a degree where it loses its connection and relevance to the rest of the field and thus loses its relevancy
	External siloing	- A side-effect of the tourism field's struggle to establish itself as a legitimate field of study is that it has become isolated from other fields - The challenge is now to export tourism knowledge to other fields of study