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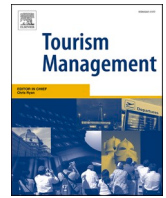
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A longitudinal analysis of judgement approaches to sustainability paradoxes

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates how tourism executives heuristically navigate sustainable tourism paradoxes at a time of unprecedented global change. We do so longitudinally by applying a 'then' and 'now' perspective and structural narrative analysis to in-depth interview data collected in 2014 and again in 2022, posing the same questions to the same 12 world-wide renowned sustainable tourism executives. The research provides an original investigation of the paradox-mindset needed to grapple with complex challenges of carbon-creation in travel, competing stakeholder needs and how to manage growth with finite resources. Findings provide insight into sustainability paradoxes as mindsets vary between rejection, awareness and acceptance. Empathy 'now' replaces elitism 'then'. Respondents reject the myth of sustainability sacrifice, instead acknowledging sustainability as a necessary driver for good business. Further, despite calls for greater ethical praxis, concrete action appears to fade in the face of self-interest and the 'tourism saves' mantra.

1. Impact statement

This research advances the conceptual understanding of Paradox Theory in the context of sustainable tourism and contributes to literature at the academic juncture of tourism management, ethics and sustainability. We advance paradox perspectives as a theoretical lens by demonstrating the significance of temporal shifts and evolving reflections in the perception of complex paradoxical tensions. To date, literatures on paradox have critiqued the role of time and attempted to address paradoxical tensions. Yet, evidence has tended to reflect snapshots or points in time. Therefore, our research provides a methodological stimulus for longitudinal research on tourism management, which is scarce. From a management perspective, our findings hold far-reaching sustainability and business ethics implications for individuals, organisations and societies. Complex challenges with alternative potential outcomes and stakeholders' interests are grappled with. Our research can serve tourism managers to guide their reflections, and tourism management educators in developing their ethical decision-making skills.

2. Introduction

When Higham, Font and Wu (2021) published their 'code red for sustainable tourism' in November 2021, the world had experienced profound changes following nearly two years of a global pandemic resulting in unforeseen human tragedy. There is clear evidence of a continuing acceleration of the Climate Crisis with only modest success of the COP26 conference in Glasgow, UK in 2021 and, since then, the COP27 conference in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt in 2022. Nevertheless, there has been a growing critique of the inadequacies of the neoliberal growth paradigm in confronting global sustainability challenges (Young, 2020). Furthermore, the collapse of tourism during the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent discussions of 'building back better' provided opportunities for reflection. In this dynamic and shifting tourism landscape, the authors considered this an appropriate time to revisit the set of qualitative data, originally collected in 2014, aimed at critically evaluating the judgements of tourism executives when assessing ethically complex sustainability paradoxes. The original data consisted of in-depth interviews with leaders in sustainable tourism, which was unpublished with a view to conducting a longitudinal study. As such, eight years on from the original data collection, the researchers

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felt there was value in conducting follow-up in-depth interviews with the same original participants in order to answer the question: How do tourism executives navigate sustainable tourism paradoxes at this time of unprecedented change?

The research comprises two core objectives: (1) to investigate the path of moral reasoning employed by tourism practitioners when faced with sustainability paradoxes; and (2) to reflect upon the longitudinal nature of this research and the path of moral reasoning *then* and *now*. Sustainability paradoxes in this research result from a comprehensive review of extant literature of sustainable tourism and ethical dilemmas in business and tourism (see Power, 2015b). Paradox Theory offers a suitable theoretical lens (Schad, Lewis, & Smith, 2019; Smith & Lewis, 2011) to interpret the tourism practitioners' moral reasoning paths. The unique value of Paradox Theory lies in its effectiveness to investigate contradictory phenomena and to "push against established boundaries" (Schad et al., 2019, p.110). This analysis advances conceptual understanding, questioning the ethical complexity of sustainability and contributing to literature at the academic juncture of tourism ethics, management and sustainability. It can also serve practitioners to guide their reflections and judgement approaches, and business ethics educators in developing ethical decision-making skills.

This research further presents a 'then' and 'now' perspective of tourism executives and their judgment approaches to sustainable tourism paradoxes, which is echoed in the longitudinal nature of this study, allowing for a sufficiently long-time gap between the first and second periods of data collection of eight years. Adie, Amore, and Hall (2022) emphasise the need for longitudinal research in the context of sustainable tourism. However, longitudinal research in relation to sustainable tourism is scarce, focussing largely on a historical and bibliometric review of literature (e.g. Nunkoo et al., 2013; Quian, Shen and Law 2018) or tourism planning and policy document analysis (e.g. Bohlin, Brandt, & Elbe, 2016; Gunter & Wöber, 2021; McLoughlin & Hanrahan, 2019; Moyle et al., 2018). Primary empirical, longitudinal studies most often investigate the perspective of residents (e.g. Cadarso, Gómez, López, Tobarra, & Zafrilla, 2015; Cole, 2006; Lee & Baek, 2021; Liang, Luo, & Bao, 2021; Ma, Dai, & Fan, 2020; Ye, Scott, Ding, & Huang, 2012); with only few studies providing an industry and/or practitioner perspective (e.g. Alonso & Liu, 2012; Warren, Becken, & Coghlan, 2018). This study is original in its combination of context (sustainability paradoxes), theoretical lens (Paradox Theory) and longitudinal orientation. To our knowledge, it presents a unique advancement of understanding moral ambiguity of sustainability charted over a significant period of time.

The paper is structured as follows: A literature review is presented in two parts – (1) Theoretical Framing: Paradox Theory; (2) Contextual Framing: Sustainability Paradoxes in Tourism. Subsequently, the research methodology is explained. This is followed by a two-part discussion of the findings with: 1) a critique of judgement approaches for sustainability paradoxes and 2) reflections on the perspectives of 'then – 2014' and 'now – 2022'. The article concludes with theoretical and managerial contributions on paradox theorising in a messy and complicated sustainable tourism world.

3. Literature review

3.1. Theoretical framing: Paradox Theory

It is important to situate research and make explicit the theoretical framing drawn upon in terms of pertinent theory and conceptual perspectives (Zahra & Newey, 2009). This research study is fundamentally concerned with the complex nature of paradox in terms of issues surrounding sustainability in the tourism context. As such, Paradox Theory offers a suitable analytic guide (Schad et al., 2019; Smith & Lewis, 2011) to longitudinally compare and chart tourism practitioners' paths of moral reasoning, by viewing the dilemmas they face as being interwoven with paradoxes, thereby affecting the dynamics of their ethical

judgements.

Paradox Theory describes elements or occurrences that hold contradictory features, and co-existing or competing tensions that may pull in different directions and be more or less enduring (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Paradoxes are therefore closely related to other constructs including dilemmas. This has added to the complexity of the phenomena and debates in the literature regarding how paradox can be defined, conceptualized, and applied in various contexts (Smith & Lewis, 2011). There is some debate in the literature concerning constructs and their potential differences, however many advocates of Paradox Theory characterize dilemmas and paradoxes as intertwined or potentially overlapping, with both influencing and enlightening an individual's dynamic decision-making (Smith, 2014). Furthermore, as Smith (2014) further critiques, dilemmas may well be solvable, whereas a paradox tends to defy resolution. However, the temporal and inherently overlapping nature and intertwined complexities between constructs may alternatively be apparent. Smith and Lewis argue that dilemmas may prove to be paradoxical (and therefore not clearly distinguishable from paradoxes) if "choice between A and B is temporary. Over time the contradictions resurface, suggesting their interrelatedness and persistence" (2011, p.387). It can be argued therefore that organisational sustainability and other features supporting long-term success can be enabled by concurrent engagement with connected, interlinked paradoxical tensions (Smith, Gonin, & Besharov, 2013). Thus, a corporate sustainability perspective on paradox is one that "accommodates interrelated yet conflicting economic, environmental, and social concerns with the objective of achieving superior business contributions to sustainable development" (Hahn, Figge, Pinkse, & Preuss, 2018, p. 237). One may thus surmise that a core attribute of paradox is that there is a co-existence or co-presence of simultaneously contradictory and discordant states or forces.

Our study is concerned with phenomena possessing tensions and features that make them inherently paradoxical in nature. These create challenges for actors trying to make judgments about the paradox, and potentially alter the potency of its paradoxical state. Paradox Theory does not offer a solution to paradoxes. Uncertainty remains over whether actors will resolve their paradoxical tensions given the epistemological challenge that a paradox presents. However, what is likely is that actors will seek to navigate and think through their own mental heuristics or paths of reasoning; focussing on structural narratives rather than outcomes. That is why complex judgement approaches can be illuminated by Paradox Theory (Luscher & Lewis, 2008; Smith, Erez, Jarvenpaa, Lewis, & Tracey, 2017; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

A paradox theoretical lens can be used to examine and clarify contexts where, and times when, long-term tensions exist (Carollo & Guerici, 2018; Schad, Lewis, Raisch, & Smith, 2016). For Hahn et al. (2018, p. 235), Paradox Theory can do so by "explicitly acknowledging tensions between different desirable, yet interdependent and conflicting sustainability objectives". Thus in the present study, a paradox perspective is suitable for viewing contexts of organisational pluralism (Lewis & Kelemen, 2002); and where multiple stakeholders are involved in shareholder-responsive firms (Wheeler, Fabig, & Boele, 2002). It is not limited to just exploring where, when and whether competing demands of multiple stakeholders are addressed (Agle et al., 2008). Actors can feel pressured to choose between conflicting demands in order to reduce tensions and minimise ambiguities for themselves, as choosing between demands may create value conflict dilemmas (Jensen, 2008). As striving to fulfil stakeholders' competing demands can generate ethical dilemmas and lasting tensions (Smith et al., 2013), they require to adopt both approaches (Smith, 2014; Smith, Lewis, & Tushman, 2016), and engage with interrelated, co-present opposites (Clegg, da Cunha, & e Cunha, 2002).

In problematic situations, paradox is an "invitation to act" (Beech, Burns, de Caestecker, MacIntosh, & MacLean, 2004, p. 1313) in new ways, by engaging with their contradictions and complexities. Skilled management of such contradictions and complexities enhances

organisational learning (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Smith and Tushman 2005). Indeed, moving from only focussing on dilemmas, requiring one-sided choices and solutions, to focussing on paradoxes of long-term contradictions and tensions, can result in transformational, meaningful learning (Kark, Preser, & Zion-Waldoks, 2016). Although working through paradoxes can challenge actors, dynamic contexts tend to intensify their experiences of complexity and ambiguity and present them with interrelated paradoxical tensions (Costanzo & Di Domenico, 2015; Luscher & Lewis, 2008). These tensions may be unlocked, and innovation spurred by adopting a “paradox mindset – the extent to which one is accepting of and energized by tensions” (Miron-Spektor, Ingram, Keller, Smith, & Lewis, 2018, p. 26). It involves recognising dilemmas as paradoxes if “no choice can resolve the tension because opposing solutions are needed and interwoven” (Luscher & Lewis, 2008, p. 229). Individuals should be aware that paradoxical tensions emphasising relatedness contrast with those dilemmas resolvable by either/or choices. Yet, actors’ perceptions can tend to obscure the relatedness of paradoxical tensions (Lewis, 2000).

Our study directly addresses the dearth of research and identified a knowledge gap in current paradox theorising, and how actors make sense of the paradoxical tensions they face comparatively over time, when tensions persist over a protracted period. In the literature it is stressed how more research is needed into how actors perceive and understand such tensions (Raisch, Hargrave and Van de Ven, 2018), especially in terms of sustainable tourism paradoxes (Williams & Ponsford, 2009). Like Kark et al. (2016) exploring paradoxes that may reveal actors’ transformational and meaningful learning, we focus on paradoxes that hold long-term contradictions and tensions. We also explore the context-sensitivity or embeddedness of paradox, specifically drawing upon tourism and sustainability phenomena *per se*, and how they may frame actors’ viewpoints, as they seek to navigate their own understandings and reflections on sustainable tourism paradoxes at a time of unprecedented global change.

3.2. Contextual framing: Sustainability Paradoxes in Tourism

The contextual framing of this study originates from a review of extant literature on ethical dilemmas in tourism and the ethical complexity of sustainability in tourism (see Power, 2015b) and an update in light of recent academic debate. The aim of this contextual framing is to develop a set of proxy dilemmas representing a sustainable tourism paradox, each allowing the investigation of ethical judgement approaches in a complex and dynamic tourism landscape; and thus, providing the interview guide for the empirical stage of research. Lurie and Albin (2007, p. 196) define dilemmas as situations where people do not know “how to act because of conflicting beliefs about what is axiologically required”; thus, pre-empting a sense of paradox. A dilemma occurs when there is a conflict of legal, moral, practical, idealistic or religious standards (Graafland et al., 2006). To overcome and progress dilemmas, individuals must adopt a ‘paradox-mindset’ (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). Ethical dilemmas can be largely grouped into three types according to Hannafey (2003): misrepresentation, relationship and distribution dilemmas.

Misrepresentation in business seeks to disguise, omit or conceal important information from stakeholders in order to gain a competitive advantage (Brenkert, 2009), securing support (Hannafey, 2003) or achieving social legitimisation (Anderson & Smith, 2007). Cadbury (2002) posits that opportunism lies at the centre of misrepresentation dilemmas. In the context of sustainable tourism, misrepresentation is abundant; with critics pronouncing the idea of sustainable tourism itself as “delusional” (Sharpley, 2010, p. 8). Russell and Faulkner (2004) and Shaw (2004) investigate this misrepresentation in the area of tourism entrepreneurship, while Wheeler (1995) explores its use in tourism marketing practices. According to UNEP-WTO (2005, p. 11), sustainable tourism promotes the maximisation of positive benefits for people with minimum negative impacts on the environment. The issue raises

questions about the monitoring and reporting of said maximum benefits and negative impacts, raising questions of transparency and accountability (Power, 2015a). Examples include: 1) ‘green-washing’ – the deliberate deceit by some companies about their sustainability credentials (see Blome, Foerstl, & Schleper, 2017; Bowen & Aragon-Correa, 2014; Chatzidakis, Shaw, & Allen, 2021; Siano, Voller, Conte, & Amabile, 2017; for a critique of this practice); and 2) ‘green-hushing’ as described by Font, Elgammal, and Lamond (2017), which depicts the complicity of the industry through creating overly positive accounts, while not drawing attention to the negative impacts of tourism – much of the latter has become evident in the ‘build back better’ narrative following the Covid-19 pandemic.

The most conspicuous ‘green-hushing’ event in tourism remains the question of carbon emissions. Despite protracted efforts of decarbonisation, tourism is in fact a carbon-creating economy (Hollenhorst, Houge-Mackenzie, & Ostergren, 2014), fraught with ‘eco-hypocrite’ (Mkono, 2020) and decarbonisation efforts based on ‘trojan horses’ (Becken, 2019). At the most basic level of misrepresentation lies the fact that even tourism businesses lauded for their low-carbon and sustainability credentials nonetheless rely on visitors travelling often large distances, and thus emitting high amounts of greenhouse gases as part of their journey. Gössling, Hanna, Higham, Cohen, and Hopkins (2019, p. 9) question the necessity of airtravel, concluding travellers are “conveniently ignoring” the need or indeed desirability of air travel and its carbon impact. A recent review of air travel behaviour suggests that a “psychology of denial” (Gössling & Dolnicar, 2023, p. 8) remains strong among travellers. Air travel behaviour is highly individualistic, yet a collective action approach is needed to address this global sustainability dilemma (Higham, Ellis, & Maclaurin, 2019) – an approach that seems lacking in willingness among the travel trade (McKercher, Mak, & Wong, 2014). From a longitudinal perspective, the question remains as relevant in 2022 as it was in 2014 – if not more – considering the acceleration of the Climate Crisis, urgent responses of the global community (e.g. The Paris Agreement 2015 COP21, The Glasgow Climate Pact 2021 COP26), a rise in nonviolent direct action (e.g. Extinction Rebellion; Just Stop Oil) and a generational public mobilisation on unprecedented scale (e.g. Fridays for Future). The first Sustainability Paradox under investigation is thus:

“Can tourism ever be really sustainable if people continue to fly?”

The second sustainability dilemma is relational as it concerns the prioritisation of needs between different stakeholder groups. UNEP-WTO (2005, p. 11) stipulates “respect for all host communities and their socio-cultural heritage”. Intrinsic to this is an ethic of care, based on harmony and happiness in others (Fennell, 2006; Hartman, 2011). Harmony means making ‘good’ tourism and ‘just’ tourism (Hultsman, 1995), thereby adding a virtue orientation to the aforementioned utilitarian dimension of sustainable tourism (Power, 2015a). Ateljevic (2020) imagines ‘good’ tourism to be embedded within the planetary ecosystem; while Higgins-Desboilles (2020, p. 8) contends that tourism must be made “responsive and answerable to society in which it occurs.” Wempe (2005) and Cadbury (2002) discuss relationship dilemmas arising from a needs perspective of different stakeholders, yet destinations have frequently been seen to prioritise tourists’ wellbeing over their own residents’ needs. The dilemma, thus, arises when ‘making good’ or ‘being just’ means different things to different people and when motivational, moral, emotional and practical standards clash on multiple levels among multiple stakeholders within the ‘experience’ industry. Relationships have been placed under a severe stress test in the recent past following the Covid-19 pandemic and all its implications for human interaction. Gössling, Scott, and Hall (2021, p. 15) provide a rapid assessment of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic of the global travel industry, concluding that only a re-orientation toward sustainable development can provide a meaning “transformation of the global tourism system”. Lessons can be drawn over how to create shared values for the health of all stakeholders in the tourism system

(Della Lucia, Giudici, & Dimanche, 2021). However, it still remains unclear whether a renewed post-pandemic focus on sustainability is indispensable for making tourism 'good' and 'just' (Rastegar, Higgins-Desbiolles, & Ruhanen, 2021) or whether it constitutes a "war on the industry" (Butcher, 2020). Adopting a paradox perspective can disentangle relationships dilemmas by promoting the use of "multiple, incompatible logics simultaneously" (Smith & Tracey, 2016, p. 456). The second Sustainability Paradox is investigating the balance of needs between different stakeholders. The question asked is thus:

"Is the pursuit of sustainability in tourism compromised by the need to provide 'good' customer experiences?"

The third sustainability dilemma relates to the ambition for continuing growth in the sector in a world of finite resources. The UNEP-WTO states that "sustainable tourism includes ... the long-term viability of tourism with the aim of enjoyment of future generations." (UNEP-WTO, 2005, p. 11). This theme is exemplified by a belief in inter-generational equity (Crane & Matten, 2019) – a core premise of sustainable development. Sustainable development, however, is in itself paradoxical in relation to the growth paradigm. While economic growth forms one part of sustainable development (Brundtland, 1987), critics argue that this is incompatible with ecological conservation and social equity (Demaria, Schneider, Sekulova, & Martinez-Alier, 2013; Jackson, 2019). Emerging from a social movement, the ideology of degrowth and sufficiency has entered critical scholarship in recent years. In essence, degrowth calls for a planned reduction in economic activity in order to achieve social equity and living within planetary, ecological boundaries (Kallis et al., 2018). This stands in contrast to tourism development, which has pursued the path of perpetual growth to increase outputs, satisfaction and benefits for all. However, commentators argue that seeking continued growth is a delusion (Pilling, 2019) and that tourism has fallen victim to its own obsession with growth (Becken, 2019; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Sharpley, 2020). The dilemma revolves around rights and responsibilities within tourism; and the fair and equitable distribution of benefits and harmful impacts inter- and intra-generationally (Graafland, 2002), topics discussed more broadly in the business ethics literature by Chonko, Wotruba, and Loe (2003) and Drake and Schlachter (2008), as well as Brenkert (2009), Ateljevic and Li (2007), Lashley and Rowson (2010) as well as Ioannides and Petersen (2003) more specifically in the tourism entrepreneurship literature. The distribution dilemma thus requires collaborative and fair approaches to tourism development (Jamal & Stronza, 2009), incorporating procedural and distributive justice concepts (Jamal & Camargo, 2014; Moufakkir, 2012).

Moreover, degrowth and sufficiency proponents question the validity of economic growth as an indicator for prosperity and wellbeing in the first place (Van den Bergh & Kallis, 2012). The lack of a positive correlation between economic growth and subjective wellbeing has been long understood in relation to tourism through Doxey's Irridex (Doxey, 1975) and the Tourism Area Life Cycle (Butler, 1980), but more widely is referred to as the Easterlin Paradox (Easterlin, 1974). The negative impacts of the acceleration of tourism (Mihalic, 2020) have presented themselves numerous and researchers are calling for slowing down tourism or tourism de-growth (Andriotis, 2018; Buckley, Gretzel, Scott, Weaver, & Becken, 2015; Fletcher, Murray Mas, Blanco-Romero, & Blázquez-Salom, 2019; Gáscón, 2019; Hall, 2009; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018). This call for de-growth, however, has seen strong, negative reactions in light of driving tourism post-pandemic recovery, with some commentators calling it an affront on the industry and the much-needed employment it generates (Butcher, 2021). Others acknowledge that curtailing growth would infringe a philosophical right to tourism (Breakey & Breakey, 2013), the social right to tourism (McCabe & Diekmann, 2015) and the human right to travel and freedom of movement (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2013). The paradox perspective examines the tensions in sense-making of distributive justice in tourism (Raisch, Hargrave, & van de Ven, 2018). The final

Sustainability Paradox is set up as a thought experiment investigating how tourism can continue to grow on a finite planet taking into consideration rights and responsibilities. The question is thus:

"If perpetual tourism growth is not sustainable, how can we meet everyone's right to travel?"

4. Methodology

The research is philosophically bound to subjective, personal constructivism and the Personal Construct Theory (PCT) research strategy. It revolves around targeted respondents making judgements about events based on their own experiences (Kelly, 2003). American psychologist, George Kelly, devised PCT in the 1950s, believing people's judgements to result from anticipating outcomes based on past experiences (Kelly, 2003). The theory emphasises relationships between personal constructs and human experiences (Botterill, 1989). PCT relates to using an applied ethics lens (Werhane, 1996), which observes individual narratives to specific events. PCT is well-suited to investigating dilemmas and paradoxes, according to previous researchers in psychology and adult-learning (e.g. Denicolo, 1995; Feixas, 2016, pp. 230–240; Feixas & Saúl, 2005, pp. 136–147; Mezirow, 1981; Pope & Denicolo, 1986; Raskin, 2002). PCT supports a longitudinal perspective by focussing on how past events inform today's judgements. Thus, a longitudinal, qualitative methodology of in-depth interviews was chosen as the most appropriate pathway for achieving the research objectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The targeted respondents in this research are tourism executives, whose individual judgement about Sustainability Paradoxes constitutes the investigation's basis. The aim of this research is to investigate individuals who can be deemed as Ideal Types (Weber, 1922), or a grouping of objectively possible (Rogers, 1969) cases, rather than a representative sample of the tourism practitioner population. As such, the sample focusses on being representative of theory (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). The selection of research participants is, therefore, based on homogenous-purposive sampling. The basis for this sampling strategy requires a personal judgment about the appropriateness of potential research participants (Saunders et al., 2019), which was based on desktop research about individuals following a call for participation. The following selection criteria are designed to achieve homogeneity – and thus trustworthiness – in the sample population, whilst purposiveness is achieved by designing inclusion criteria that are theoretically linked to the study. The inclusion criteria are that individuals should be: 1) tourism practitioners; 2) holding a position of authority; and 3) in businesses with a strong sustainability orientation. The initial recruitment took place in 2014 following a call for participation via LinkedIn and our professional networks. An interest was expressed by 27 individuals, of whom 15 met the sampling criteria, a number sufficient to achieve data saturation in PCT research (Denicolo, 2003; Saunders & Townsend, 2015). This research follows the guidance of Saunders et al. (2018) that inductive, thematic saturation is achieved when no new codes emerge during the analysis process. These 15 individuals were contacted again in January 2022 for the purpose of a follow-up interview, with 12 agreeing to take part. In total, we conducted 27 in-depth interviews – once in 2014 and again in 2022. However, to ensure dependability of the data set, we present here the findings from the interviews of those participants who took part in both data collection instances. Dependability is promoted through coherence (e.g. having an audit trail and an interview guide) and completeness (focussing on the 12 + 12 panel) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Institutional ethical approval was granted for both instances of data collection, with a requirement for data collected in 2014 to be stored for 10 years. Table 1 provides information on the final 12 + 12 panel of research participants and how they meet the inclusion criteria.

Interviews took place in February 2014 and then again in February 2022. All interviews lasted 60–90min and were conducted using video-

Table 1
List of interviewee panel [12 + 12].

No and alias	Inclusion criteria			Additional information on participants	
	Practitioner in the following tourism sector	Position of authority	Sustainable business evidence	Location	Years of sector experience by 2022
1 Aaron	Hospitality consultancy	President	Winner of sustainable tourism award	USA/Costa Rica	23
2 Abigail	Ecotourism consultancy	Founder/Director	Winner of sustainable tourism award	Australia/ Mozambique	20
3 Chris	Tourism consultancy	Founder/Director	Judge for sustainable tourism award	USA	44
4 Deborah	Tourism consultancy	Self-employed	Judge for sustainable tourism award	USA/Cambodia	18
5 Gloria	Travel media outlet	Owner, editor-in-chief	Sustainable tourism broadcaster	UK/New Zealand	43
6 Kenneth	Corporate travel philanthropy firm	Executive Director	Judge for sustainable tourism award	USA/Namibia	22
7 Nora	Accommodation/Safari Lodge	Owner and Chief Executive	Winner of sustainable tourism award	Kenya	31
8 Nadine	Culinary Arts School	Owner and Chief Executive	Winner of sustainable tourism award	Greece	25
9 Rory	Tourism consultancy	Marketing Director	Winner of sustainable tourism award	USA/Costa Rica	31
10 Robert	Travel media outlet	Owner and Chief Executive	Judge for sustainable tourism award	UK	18
11 Susan	Travel philanthropy firm	Chief Executive Officer	Founder of sustainable tourism social media app	UK	15
12 Timothy	Tourism consultancy	Owner and Chief Executive	Judge for sustainable tourism award	Australia	44

calling software (Skype in 2014 and Zoom in 2022). All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed in full, and imported into NVivo12 for sorting, coding and interpretation. Furthermore, all interviews followed an interview topic guide based on the contextual framing of this research, thereby improving the dependability of the findings. Fig. 1 provides a summary of the topics. We elaborated on conversation topics through the use of prompts, e.g. the acceleration of the climate crisis, over-tourism, post-pandemic tourism recovery and changes in demand evolution.

The research objectives seek to investigate the path of moral reasoning as well as to reflect on the longitudinal nature of this research. To achieve these, we used structural narrative analysis for coding and interpretation. Structural narrative analysis investigates ‘how’ narratives are constructed rather than ‘what’ the narrative is (Saunders et al., 2019). Codes are developed from how research participants follow their path of moral reasoning. Structural narrative analysis is embedded within PCT by focussing on a person’s thinking patterns which are psychologically guided by personal paradoxes (Kelly, 2003). While ambiguity is at the heart of PCT, structural narrative analysis provides a tool for making sense of ambiguity. It has previously been used as an analysis tool in sustainability related paradox investigations (e.g. Berg & Hukkinen, 2011). The coding process involved six distinctive steps: 1) categorising the data; 2) line-by-line coding; 3) focused-coding; 4) memoing; 5) conceptualisation; and 6) longitudinal reflection.

First, the interview transcripts were imported into NVivo12 and grouped into four categories: 1) 2014 response to dilemma; 2) 2022

response to dilemma; 3) 2022 rebuttal to 2014 response; 4) wider reflections changes between 2014 and 2022. Second, line-by-line coding took place. Line-by-line coding is useful in structural narrative analysis as it stays close to the data. Such coding reveals visible pathways of thinking and action (Charmaz, 2014). In so doing, 124 individual codes were created across all 27 interviews. Third, we engaged in focused-coding, a form of analytical sense-making (Charmaz, 2014). This involves making decisions about the internal validity and credibility of initial codes. Codes with less than 10 references were discarded and similar codes merged. This process resulted in 71 focused codes. The fourth step was memoing – the practice of making interpretative notes for each category and their respective focused codes. Memo-writing increases the level of abstraction from codes to constructs and categories to concepts (Charmaz, 2014), thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Decrop, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a fifth step, conceptualisation took place by theoretically and analytically interpreting the remaining focused codes and memos. Table 2 presents the list of 16 final concepts divided in relevance for each dilemma. These represent the path of moral reasoning as they have inductively emerged through the coding process. These are discussed in detail in section 4. The analysis spans across both data collection incidences in 2014 and 2022. Aliases used are reflective of neither gender nor nationality, which are not investigated, although future research may look at cultural, gender or indeed sector differences.

In the final step, longitudinal reflection took place by comparing responses from 2014, 2022 and the individual respondents’ rebuttals

Sustainability Paradoxes		
<p>Misrepresentation: The Flying Dilemma <i>"Can tourism ever be really sustainable if people continue to fly?"</i></p>	<p>Relationships: The Experience Dilemma <i>"Is sustainability in tourism compromised by the need to provide good' customer experiences?"</i></p>	<p>Distribution: The Growth Dilemma <i>"If perpetual tourism growth is not sustainable, how can we meet everyone's right to travel?"</i></p>

Fig. 1. Interview topics.

Table 2
Structural narrative analysis concepts (moral reasoning pathway).

Sustainability Paradox	Concepts
The Flying Dilemma	Paradox Acceptance » Progress Evaluation » Re-direction of Responsibility » Value Pluralism » Tourism Saves
The Experience Dilemma	Paradox Rejection » Challenging False Dichotomies » [Cognitive Framing + Locus of Control] » Sustainability Evolves
The Growth Dilemma	Paradox Awareness » Dialectics [socio-ecological imagination + economics of exclusivity + reframing travel] » Ethical Praxis

and reflections.

5. Findings: a path to moral reasoning for sustainability paradoxes

5.1. The flying dilemma – from paradox acceptance to perpetuating the ‘tourism saves’ mantra

When confronted with the dilemma of flying, and in a broader sense the carbon-creating nature of tourism (Hollenhorst et al., 2014), respondents were quick to accept this dilemma. Following their own internal reflections it was evident that respondents did not just demonstrate awareness of the dilemma, but indeed an acceptance of the carbon-paradox that underpins international travel. “*I have been struggling with this question too, and I think this is a true statement.*”, explains Deborah-2022; while Timothy-2014 accepts: “*This is a dilemma. How do you justify that? You can’t. It is simply not sustainable to carry on flying.*”.

This is significant as all respondents are not just recognised leaders of sustainable tourism, but also engaged in the promotion of international travel. It is thus notable that the paradox acceptance moves beyond simply recognising the existence of the dilemma towards acknowledging and accepting one’s own contribution to it – even among those with strong sustainability awareness and carbon literacy. Aaron-2022 admits that “*even folks that are eco-sustainable educated as myself; I was still flying from London to Lisbon for lunch and back the same evening. It’s just not sustainable.*” Meanwhile, Gloria-2014 concurs “*There is a need to acknowledge that while travel can be a force for good, it is destructive.*”

Paradox acceptance means adopting a paradox mindset (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018), which respondents appeared willing to do. This paves the way for a meaningful discussion, materialising in the form of evaluating the progress that has been made both in the years between the two instances of data collection and prior to 2014. Optimism – “*We have made much more development and stride when it comes to sustainable tourism than I had imagined 15 years ago.*” (Chris-2014) – gives way to mobilisation – “*Reflecting on that, we still have a huge way to go.*” (Chris-2022). The paradox presents an “invitation to act” (Beech et al., 2004, p. 1313). Respondents further reflected on the changing narratives and longevity of the flying dilemma, with a need to focus on solutions. Abigail-2022 explains:

“People are waking up and becoming more conscious of the need to have a climate action plan and to be part of the solution instead of making things worse. There is a lot of language and understanding that has developed and a lot has accelerated for me personally, as well as for consumers and within the industry.”

Respondents observed that the level of awareness and acceptance has changed significantly over the period of this longitudinal study. Kenneth-2022 explains how organisational learning through paradoxical tensions (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Smith et al., 2016) has taken place; while Robert-2022 warns that progress evaluation is important, yet the future is not so distant after all:

“I use my company as an example of dialogue that’s taking place at a global tour operator that would never have been on the table eight years ago.” (Kenneth-2022)

“If we are looking in terms of the future, we must acknowledge that we can’t be so casual about flying anymore. And when I say ‘future’, I mean the next decade because that’s when it is really going to hit us.” (Robert-2022)

Surprisingly, in a move that followed paradox acceptance and evaluation of progress, respondents engaged in a substantiated effort to redirect responsibility for this dilemma away from their own sphere of influence. This was evident across all interviews in 2014 and 2022 with 82 individual references to the re-direction of responsibility. Thus, for Nadine-2014 “*We can’t really dictate to people what to do. They will travel, no matter what.*” Again eight years later Nora-2022 says “*I don’t know what the airlines are doing for carbon emissions. I think the onus is on them.*” While Rory-2022 asserts that “*The industry is in survival mode right now after the pandemic. Companies will be more concerned with getting people to travel than carbon emissions.*”

Responsibility for dealing with the carbon-creation of the industry is re-directed to other sectors within the industry (e.g. airlines, cruise lines), onto the travellers themselves, or indeed situated at the behest of external forces – a conflict that Colonomos (2005) identified as a tension between business goals and accountability. This positioning of ‘self’ (Hug, Reay, & Chreim, 2017) vis-à-vis other actors and forces anchors the respondents in the paradox discussion and allows for the personal construction of judgements based on one’s own experiences (Kelly, 2003). In accepting the paradox, evaluating its progress and re-directing responsibility through the positioning of ‘self’, respondents have created a paradox ‘black box’ (Sheremata, 2000) with clear boundaries. However, these boundaries then become subject to value pluralism as the data suggests. Value pluralism accepts competing moral values concurrently and embraces multiple perspectives and “*thinking realistically*” (Susan-2014). Value pluralism acknowledges acceptable boundaries within the paradox black box. Multiple values/perspectives are accepted that are means to an end – the end being ‘quality of life’. Nora-2022 explains:

“You can look through that lens and the answer is ‘No, it can’t be sustainable’. And then you look at this through another lens. Because we have much bigger issues to worry about in Africa, like feeding our children than to sit and worry about carbon emissions.”

Contrary to value pluralism, relativism assumes equal moral standing between values. This is not the case with the Flying Dilemma. Robert-2014 explains:

“It’s like comparing apples with lemons. You can’t compare your carbon emissions from flying with the social and economic benefit you might bring to a destination.”

Organisational or context pluralism builds the basis for paradox reasoning (Lewis & Kelemen, 2002). This can be challenging to formulate coherently as the statement from Chris-2014 shows: “*Well, I have two views on that. One view is ... [silence] ... how shall I put it ... [silence] ... I am going to say three things.*” A monistic lens is rejected as “*irrational*” (Aaron-2014), “*myopic*” (Deborah-2022) and “*not realistic*” (Timothy-2014). Thus, value pluralism is the pervasive moral stance on the Flying Dilemma.

The data reveals that this process of dealing with the Flying Dilemma culminates in a dynamic decision or judgment (Smith, 2014), which may well be temporary (Smith & Lewis, 2011), but appears to be recurring in answers from both 2014 and 2022. The proposed answer is: ‘Tourism Saves’. Respondents argue ardently that, taking all aspects into account, continuing with tourism and accepting its necessity for carbon-creation provides greater benefits for society and the planet than ‘pulling the plug’ on travel. Respondents fear that a lack of tourism spells disaster for both people and planet, which outweighs the dangers from

carbon-creation through international travel.

“If we suddenly said tomorrow, we can’t fly, then I worry that the negative consequences and outcomes would be worse, and I almost feel horrible saying that because it is almost trading off short-term pain with long-term serious environmental issues.” (Susan-2014)

“If we stopped flying tomorrow, I believe we would unleash a global conservation crisis and we would exacerbate massive poverty in the regions of the world.” (Chris-2022)

The ‘Tourism Saves’ mantra is deeply rooted in a utilitarian cost-benefit argument; with respondents arguing about a “balance-sheet” (Nora-2022), and that sustainable tourism efforts “sort of even things out and make it [flying] worthwhile.” (Abigail-2014). The invitation to act remains in place; “You can fly to places and do a lot of good there.” (Robert-2022). A path of moral reasoning for the Flying Dilemma follows a monological route: accept the paradox, evaluate progress, position one’s responsibility, acknowledge multiple values and conclude that tourism’s benefits outweigh the costs of carbon-creation. Thus, the data suggests that the path of moral reasoning among sustainable tourism leaders remains complicit in tourism’s green-hushing narrative of a better world with than without international air travel. Anything else is seen as “environmental elitism, and not at all relatable to your average person from Iowa.” (Deborah-2022).

5.2. The Experience Dilemma – from paradox rejection to the evolving nature of sustainability

The Experience Dilemma questioned whether the need to provide superior tourism experiences to one’s guests is a barrier to sustainable tourism/business operations. The dilemma is relational as it investigates whose needs supersede those of others. Respondents rejected this paradox both in 2014 and 2022; whilst acknowledging that the paradox narrative exists. Timothy-2014 states: “There is some truth in the dilemma, but I think it is overplayed.”, while Susan-2022 explains: “It is much harder to make this argument of guest satisfaction vs sustainability now.” Notably, respondents recognise the travel industry remains trapped in this dilemma.

“I love this question because I am passionately working to break down that myth. It is a myth that the hotel industry embraces – not just the hotel industry, but the whole travel industry.” (Chris-2022)

Rather than dwelling on paradox rejection, respondents were eager to challenge false dichotomies, including the question of sacrifice versus enhancement: “As a guest, I want those experiences. Whether they are a sacrifice, or an enhancement is subjective.” (Aaron-2014); the question of a continuum of sustainability: “Essentially, there is a very big spectrum of sustainability and making good decisions.” purports Susan-2022; and the question of product versus experience:

“Companies, who think that not looking at sustainability from a holistic, experiential offer point will struggle. If all you have to offer is a private pool, well then yes, this is what your guests will expect.” (Rory-2014)

Reflecting upon this eight years later, he states:

“I think you have to define what a good guest experience is. If that means the most opulent luxury as far as physical comfort goes; those two things are hard to reconcile. However, I think we are seeing something real, that people are shifting to the experiences over material things.” (Rory-2022)

The Experience Dilemma is in essence an epistemological challenge. While Paradox Rejection may have been the starting point of the discussion; respondents acknowledge the “contextual ambidexterity” (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009, p. 696) of the dilemma. Tension recognition lies at the heart of organisational sustainability (Smith et al., 2013). To further negotiate this challenge, respondents embarked on adopting a multiple lens perspective of a) cognitive framing, and b)

locus of control as evidenced in 93 individual data coding references for each concept. Cognitive framing adopts a consumer perspective, including perception and persuasion. Respondents refer to “enlightened and more sophisticated travellers” (Aaron-2014); “consumers that are far more aware” (Abigail-2022); a younger generation of consumers for whom “sustainability is more important than ever” (Rory-2022) and a market that is “driven by their values” (Kenneth-2022).

The data suggests that reconciliation is grounded in a change in values away from material products to experiences. The value framing of the Experience Dilemma is situated within an ethic of care and concern for community (Payne & Dimanche, 1996). Respondents remark that “the majority of travellers do care” (Chris-2022) and “this type of sustainable tourism will attract people who care.” (Deborah-2022). While care ethics is situated within a feminist ethics lens (Becker, 2012; Gilligan, 1982), Fennell (2019, p. 127) suggests that an ethic of care poses the most logical perspective for a sustainability ethics agenda; and it is this ethic of care that respondents tap into when seeking to break down the Experience Dilemma as Chris-2022 explains:

“The vast majority of travellers do care, and the truth is, when travellers are given the choice – if they believe they have options – we can say ‘You can have that vacation of a lifetime and you can have it in a way that is much more positive and contributes positively to the destination, the people and the environment.’ – I am telling you: everybody will choose that.”

However, cognitive framing in relation to the Experience Dilemma also requires agency on behalf of the sustainable tourism industry. Respondents acknowledge that the onus is on industry to change consumer demand and expectations to be more aligned with sustainability principles. Deborah-2022 states “We are just going to have to change those desires.” The focus is on challenging consumers as Abigail-2022 explains “Consumers are far more aware, and the barriers are easier. You can push it further and further now.” Pushing the sustainability message signifies being a good, sustainable tourism operator, as Nora-2022 states:

“If you are a good operator, you can market the sustainability message well, and if you are a good operator, you can also deliver this experience well. It doesn’t have to be one or the other.”

The message remains that experience is the driver. However, this is achieved through sustainability rather than consumption. While consumers are recognised as key stakeholders in this relationship, respondents eagerly reflect on their own ability to influence this dilemma – their own locus of control. Locus of control relates to the ability to exercise power in states of uncertainty and is widely considered one of the ‘big 5’ entrepreneurial traits (Chell, Wicklander, Sturman, & Hoover, 2008). It is also related to functional risk (Brandstätter, 2011). Previous research on locus of control and functional risk in the context of sustainable tourism entrepreneurship has highlighted that it revolves around a set of dichotomies (Power, Di Domenico, & Miller, 2020). The research explains that system intelligence is used to overcome such functional risks, thereby increasing one’s locus of control (Power, Di Domenico, & Miller, 2020). This was reflective of the respondents’ responses in this research, who upon negotiating the Experience Dilemma surmise that “good design” (Timothy-2014) and “intelligent luxury” (Abigail-2022) is required to dismantle the Experience Dilemma. Furthermore, respondents argue that the dilemma may only be solved if a holistic, whole-system approach is adopted.

“I think it’s all interrelated, the whole sustainability question is so complex and interrelated that it needs to be thought about as a whole picture and a whole system. But every time one part of that system gains momentum and energy, I think it benefits positively in these other areas.” (Kenneth-2022)

The moral pathway for judging the Experience Dilemma seeks to find solutions that ensure the health of all stakeholders (Della Lucia et al., 2021), thereby allowing the presence of multiple logics (Smith & Tracey,

2016). Noteworthy is the reflection of respondents in relation to activist shareholders as a group of stakeholders exercising much locus of control. Susan-2022 explains:

“Increasingly we see activist investors voted into boards and creating a kind of catalyst for sustainability that wasn’t there before. We underestimate the influence that those very small group of people with very big pockets have on the entire operational industry, which then has an impact on guest experience, which then has an impact on how we create truly sustainable business models.”

Carollo and Guerci (2018, p. 248) explain that such “activists in a suit” serve as a “powerful metaphor” (p.260) for persons with emergent loci of control in sustainability identity and sustainability paradoxes. The following observation by respondents concludes the discussion on the Experience Dilemma: the sustainability mandate evolves. Aaron-2022 reflects “... that reconciliation [between sustainability and guest experience] is coming from both sides.” Other respondents speak of a “global awakening” (Chris-2022); and while in 2014 sustainability may have still received a novelty or special status, this is no longer the case in 2022.

5.3. The Growth Dilemma – from paradox awareness to an ethical praxis of tourism

The final paradox discusses the question of the (un)sustainability of the tourism industry’s continuous growth. Since the early 1950s tourism has achieved an almost unbroken run of year-on-year increase in tourism arrivals and tourist spend. Over the duration of this research tourism has grown steadily, then significantly, then collapsed due to Covid-related restrictions, and is now tentatively growing again – all the while attempting to distribute benefits justly or failing somewhat at that (Raisch et al., 2018). Respondents demonstrate an awareness of the dilemma, which is emotionally charged: “I am so angry you have asked me this question as this is a big professional conundrum for me, as well as a personal one”, exclaims Aaron-2022; while Nora-2014 admits that “This is very scary. Especially in the wild and beautiful places where we are.” Paradox awareness precedes acceptance and action; and while awareness of the Growth Dilemma is strong – “There is a big dilemma in growth as we see it. More is not better.” (Nadine-2022) – acceptance and action are hampered by lack of data and understanding, as Susan-2022 explains:

“The question of growth is the area where we are making the least progress and that needs the most attention. We still don’t have clear metrics to understand that more complex picture than just a rise in numbers. Apart from some narrow case studies, we don’t have a clear picture yet.”

Using “batlike” words (Addie, 2020, p. 13; Olsson, 1980, p. 12) that provoke tensions (e.g. about human rights and mass tourism), the path of moral reasoning for the Growth Dilemma follows a structure of dialectical reasoning (see Marx, 1973), whereby research participants derive higher order truths from a synthesis of collisions and contradictions (Quinton, 1988, p. 225). Such reasoning is seen as less rigid than Olsson’s (1980) and Openshaw’s (1996) fuzzy logic theory (see Olsson’s (1991) own critique of fuzzy logic). Participants’ dialectical reasoning for the Growth Dilemma revolves around three areas of concerns: (1) the economics of exclusivity; (2) socio-ecological imagination; and (3) the reframing of travel. Together, these dialectics comprise a total of 141 code references in the data.

The economics of exclusivity here refers to the notion that travel – despite its philosophical debates around a ‘rights’ status – remains an activity of the few. Aaron-2014 argues that:

“Not everyone can travel. I mean, there’s a contradiction here. If we want to save these world’s last greatest treasures, these world heritage sites and

biodiversity zones, and we still want to retain a sense of authenticity in these destinations, then seven billion people cannot travel.”

The notion was wide-spread in 2014 with others agreeing that “travel is always going to be a luxury.” (Gloria-2014). Others argue that “access to travel is an anomaly” (Susan-2014) and that “not everyone will want to travel” (Rory-2014). Reflections in 2022 differ from the original thoughts. Respondents, notably, acknowledge that an economics of exclusivity insinuates a “new colonial mandate” (Aaron-2022). Furthermore, respondents accept a rite of passage of residents from emerging economies to engage in travel. Gloria-2022 reflects:

“What about the argument that there’s a huge amount of the global population who have not had the luxury of experiencing international travel and as they are developing countries, they’re developing and having more disposable income would say, ‘Well, we want to go now.’ – What do you say to them?”

In response, segmentation into the ‘right kind of tourists’ is seen as a preferred method for curbing unsustainable tourism growth and dealing with an economics of exclusivity. However, respondents in 2022 concede that “there should be no explicit segmentation and segregation of travel.” (Aaron-2022). Susan-2022 reflects:

“Gosh. That response feels a lot more antiquated than just 2014. I would say that the concept of travel is very much more challenged now. I hope we are slightly less arrogant now. It links to so many other social movements and so many other changing social narratives that are overdue, that have influenced the way that we all think our privilege and our entitlement and everything else. And I suppose travel being one of them. I certainly hope that our attitude has changed that.”

Reflections as such are indicative of a challenge of inadequacies and inequalities within the neoliberal growth paradigm (Young, 2020) and pave the way for socio-ecological imagination. Socio-ecological imagination has its roots in environmental activist literature (see Herbert, 2021; Mullally et al., 2022) with links to moral imagination (Appolloni & Hrynkow, 2016; Goodman, 2005) and a concern for the moral relationship between human flourishing and planetary moralities. Socio-ecological imagination was present in 2014 already, as the Abigail-2014 quote demonstrates:

“The implications of everyone travelling would be collapse. It would be environmental and arguably social collapse. And for as much good as travel is, we need to try doing good and/or doing better. Because the reality is that not having tourism development in some places would be arguably better for them.”

However, while Paradox Theory poses an attractive framework for examining long-term tensions (Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Schad et al., 2016), respondents are acutely aware of the fact that some of these dilemmas require more urgent responses, as raised by Gloria-2022:

“In the whole of human history, we have not seen this level of climate emergency and we haven’t been in an era since humans evolved of mass extinction. We haven’t got the luxury for a human right to travel as it stands right now. With nine billion people in the world right now, the environment can’t cope with that.”

As such, The Growth Dilemma and ensuing environmental and social dangers require a reframing of travel. Such reframing has been witnessed by participants as a response to the disruption caused by seminal events of the last eight years. Deborah-2022 explains that “I don’t know if it is cultural reconditioning or simply human nature, but I do think that we are seeing an evolution of tourism now”, and “Covid-driven – maybe – but I do think that there is a huge rush to something positive now.” (Kenneth-2022). Respondents acknowledge the reframing of travel through “structural changes that have taken place” (Rory-2022) and “a more robust domestic travel” (Nadine-2022). Susan-2022 explains:

“We are essentially on a journey of reframing what travel means to us, and I think the pandemic has helped. There were a lot of very interesting philosophical musings out during lockdown that have caused us to reframe the idea of how we experience the world around us.”

Not all share the same optimism, suggesting *“this will be a temporary shift, and then people will be back to exploring again because that’s human nature.”* (Rory-2022). To reconcile the Growth Dilemma, participants suggest adopting an ethical praxis for tourism as it evolves. Aristotelian praxis is often referred to as the conjuncture of “critical ethics and actionable knowledge” (Nielsen, 2016, p. 420) with a developmental and transformational capacity (Eikeland, 2008). Respondents emphasise that solving the Growth Dilemma is a question of “active management of tourism” (Aaron-2002), “engineering site management of destinations” (Kenneth-2022) and “managing the mass movement of people in a sustainable way” (Gloria-2014). This management, however, is not devoid of ethics and bounded in values as Chris-2022 says *“I believe that we can meet the human right to travel for all and do it in a way that reflects values. It’s about planning and management. We can do travel better.”*

Adopting a paradox mindset (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018) makes business knowledge actionable; thus, creating conditions for a reflective invitation to act (Beech et al., 2004). The final section of this discussion comprises theoretical reflections on moral reasoning and the sustainability paradoxes then (2014) and now (2022).

5.4. Longitudinal reflections of sustainability paradoxes Then (2014) and Now (2022)

Overall, respondents have not demonstrated any major shift in judgement regarding all three dilemmas between 2014 and 2022 despite the seminal events of the past eight years and their effects on society, the planet and the tourism industry. *“I think, I would still agree with this view”*, explains Nora-2022 when presented with answers from 2014 to the Growth Dilemma. *“I think, I agree to all of that”*, responds Abigail-2022 when reminded of her answer to the Flying Dilemma from 2014. These are simply illustrations of a general picture. However, as Abigail-2022 herself states *“It is a little bit more nuanced now.”* The same is found across the data set.

Acceptance of the Flying Dilemma was present both in 2014 and 2022. The change occurs in the urgency with which the dilemma is discussed in 2022. Respondents acknowledge that the issue around carbon-creation in tourism needs to be urgently addressed, as Robert-2022 states, *“If we’re looking in terms of the future, it’s about not being so casual about flying. When I say, ‘the future’, I mean the next decade because that’s when it’s going to really hit.”* Equally, Rory-2022 admits, *“At this point climate is such an urgent issue and I probably knew it back then, but it just wasn’t so in our faces as it is now.”* In their responses (see section 4.1), respondents talk about raising awareness, more dialogue and a change in consciousness. However, a clear path for action does not appear to be following through. Re-direction of responsibility and the ‘tourism saves’ mantra prevail. This raises questions over whether self-interest is winning over reason. It also suggests that subjective well-being underpins much of these tourism executives’ moral reasoning and results in a lack of pronouncing a definite solution. Thus, the paradox of carbon-creation and travel has not been resolved. The Flying Dilemma remains intact.

For the Growth Dilemma, awareness was evident both in 2014 and 2022 as the above discussion (section 4.3) shows. However, 2022 responses demonstrate a greater empathy for the effects on stakeholders resulting from this dilemma in the form of socio-ecological imagination. Aaron-2022 reflects that his response in 2014 was *“... naive. I think that was hopeful.”*, while Susan-2022 reacts to the 2014 response with, *“Gosh, that feels a lot more antiquated than just 2014. I would say, even that concept of the right to travel is very much more challenged now and I think will become ever more challenged. I hope we are slightly less arrogant now.”* While solutions for 2014 were rooted in a form of sustainability elitism,

2022 sees a greater call for a re-orientation towards ethical practices in tourism. Arguably, the paradoxical nature of perpetual tourism growth within finite boundaries and with it the ‘Tragedy of the Commons’ is still a dilemma that has not been overcome. Instead, it relies on co-operation and collaboration with strong governance – and there are little signs of those elements coming to the fore. The Growth Dilemma also remains intact.

Finally, for the next dilemma this raising of awareness has led to an important break-through and positive action. While the Experience Dilemma was rejected both in 2014 as well as in 2022, this rejection was motivated by the need to bust the *“sustainability as sacrifice myth”* (Chris-2022). The dilemma is seen as *“overplayed”* (Timothy-2014 and Timothy-2022). The focus of 2014 was on the *“sustainably-minded customer”* (Abigail-2014; Deborah-2014), and sustainability regarded as an added value through smart design and intelligent luxury. However, by 2022, sustainability had become a necessary driver for good business, and an essential part of life including travel and tourism experiences, affected by an evolving sustainability mandate. Nora-2022 expresses this thought bluntly:

“Sustainability, crudely put, is as needy as loo paper. It’s there.”

The often-paradoxical relationships in tourism between guests and hosts, their potentially competing interests and tensions, and the question of sustainability as enhancement or sacrifice, appear to be non-problematic in the eyes of these tourism executives. The Experience Dilemma is resolved.

6. Conclusion

The longitudinal assessment of three pertinent sustainability paradoxes has revealed, one fixed, and two still unresolved. For the Flying Dilemma, the paradox-mindset has shifted from acknowledging and accepting the existence of the paradox, to invoking the ‘tourism saves’ mantra that seeks to justify the carbon emissions from flying through wider benefits to people and places. Similarly, the Growth Dilemma paradox-mindset begins with awareness and through a process of dialectical reasoning calls for a greater ethical praxis in tourism and the need to ‘do travel better’ within the growth paradigm. Finally, the paradox-mindset for the Experience Dilemma sets out as rejection, but through a process of challenging false dichotomies concludes that the sustainability mandate has evolved to enable the compatibility of sustainable and positive tourism experience. Through exploring these paradoxes, the paper answers the empirical question of *“How do tourism executives heuristically navigate sustainable tourism paradoxes at a time of unprecedented change?”*

This paper shows the value of recognising the paradoxes inherent in tourism and making these contradictions explicit. Despite the evolution of greater awareness, paradoxes persist and arguably become, or are perceived to be, persistent and potentially unresolvable. We find that this may particularly occur where, despite increasing empathy and awareness-raising evolving over time, there is a perceived fundamental existential threat that accompanies attempts at paradox resolution, which in turn renders moral consensus elusive. This, it is argued, is largely due to what is at stake or perceived to be under threat. There can be resistance by actors to alter perceptions more dramatically, towards embracing a more fundamental paradigmatic shift, as doing so would completely alter the nature of consumption and the experience of tourism itself. Practitioners may try to interpret as resolvable dilemmas that are actually complex paradoxes of co-existing contradictions. The challenge of flying and the challenge of growth are not problems without solutions. Companies can decide to operate domestically, or on a regional basis, or only offer destinations that can be accessed by rail. Similarly, companies can operate within a much smaller footprint and seek to maximise quality of life, rather than quantity of life. While these can be easily dismissed as naïve, they are solutions, albeit ones that are unpalatable for much of the commercial industry. The search for a

technological solution such as synthetic aviation fuel or hydrogen power is an attempt to avoid the need to challenge existing business models, whilst addressing the sustainability challenge. Hence, the paradox is revealed to be a matter of prioritisation of values.

This need to consider the ethics of not making the changes required, needs to be done both individually and along with others, listening carefully, with empathy, to the different standpoints of various stakeholders involved, whose interests may not only diverge but also be in opposition to each other. Different alternatives and often conflicting potential outcomes should be explored. However, it seems evident that with a more educated and aware consumer, the unresolved nature of the paradoxes will be something that tourism leaders will be increasingly confronted with. This will surface not just from consumers, but also from financiers, suppliers, civil society and governments. As with all ethical dilemmas, the divide between genuinely striving for a resolution and cynically exploiting the lack of a just compromise will polarize the debate. The longer tourism continues to fail to meaningfully embrace these unresolved paradoxes, the greater the risk that external solutions are imposed on the sector, whether those be regulatory, or via public opinion.

This paper also advances theorising of the paradox perspective in and of itself as a theoretical lens by explicitly demonstrating the significance of temporal shifts and evolving reflections (i.e. a ‘then’ and ‘now’ perspective) in the perception of complex paradoxical tensions. To date, whilst literatures on paradox have certainly critiqued the role of time and the temporal dimension in the nature of and attempts to address paradoxical tensions, evidence has tended to reflect snapshots or points in time. Through our in-depth longitudinal study, we not only encourage more attention to be paid to complex and ever-present paradoxical issues in the tourism and other dynamic contexts, but we also argue that on a conceptual level paradox can endure and pervade over time. In sum, we argue that extended time-frames for reflection on judgment approaches to ethical sustainability dilemmas in dynamic contexts, despite enabling evolving appreciation of paradoxical complexity and nuance, may still not allow for paradox resolution where there exists an inherent existential threat of a phenomenon.

The respondents to this research were all chosen because they were sustainability champions and doing more than just recognising and showing awareness. As such, they are deliberately not representative of the industry, but enable us to understand what the thought leaders’ views are on the challenges facing the whole industry. Actively managing the paradoxes is crucial to demonstrate leadership and provide an example to the rest of the industry. An important area of research lies in the extent to which the leading-edge of sustainability champions can effect change through encouraging others in the industry to become more sustainable. Our research can therefore be used to both guide and support managers’ reflections, discussions, and debates, raising awareness about the relevant paradoxes and paradox-mindsets. This ‘tourism imaginative’ approach is needed in order to engage with the complexities of empathising with, and balancing, the competing needs of stakeholders and the business and ethical challenges ahead. For tourism practitioners, the research helps explain how they can benefit from gaining an understanding of the challenging paradoxes involved, and how their businesses will benefit if they engage with unresolved tensions. The research also demonstrates that sustainability champions are also wrestling with these questions, that they are complex, messy and without a clear and palatable conclusion. Recognising these challenges may hopefully encourage more businesses to engage with the debate honestly, with humility and in search of a way forward.

Future research can extrapolate our theorising to paradoxes in different dynamic environments, including alternative ones beyond the tourism context. In particular, we make calls for further research that explores values-driven judgement approaches and studies that consider the evolution of ethical judgements and moral reasoning over time. For example, these might include actors in different generational cohorts, geographies or where a technological innovation can have a bearing on

socio-temporal experiences and the consequent future dilemmas and paradoxes that could be faced.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Susann Power: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing - Original Manuscript, Writing - Revised Manuscript. **MariaLaura Di Domenico:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing - Original Manuscript, Writing - Revised Manuscript. **Graham Miller:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing - Original Manuscript, Writing - Revised Manuscript.

Declaration of competing interest

None

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