13 Collaborative Learning for Sustainable Tourism Development

Chris Heape and Janne Liburd

Introduction

Tourism is a global social and economic phenomenon, which calls for a holistic approach to tourism higher education, where the broader aims of the industry and society are explicitly addressed. The indispensable complexity of the tourism phenomenon demands professionals with a far-reaching and integrated understanding of the multiple disciplines and paradigms that are concerned with sustainable tourism development and adaptive management. Rather than resting on predefined learning outcomes, where students simply acquire knowledge about sustainable tourism development, this chapter unfolds the processes of how complex and critical understandings of sustainable tourism development are collaboratively designed with students, tutors and teachers.

At the University of Southern Denmark, the principal aim for the MA in International Tourism and Leisure Management and European Master in Tourism Management is to educate today's students to become philosophic practitioners of tomorrow. Therefore, it is important to create a learning environment that takes the challenges of unknown future practices into account. To advance higher education and learning cannot be a value-free process. Barnett laments how "the higher education community consistently evades its responsibility to declare the particular values that underpin its activities" (Barnett, 1990: 44). Bringing together the issues of unknown futures and values on epistemological terms, the knowledge collaboratively designed and disseminated will also reflect on the kind of human development we want to see (Barnett, 1990: 44; Liburd, 2013: 65).

This chapter will both trace the explorations and experiments we made and the processes we engendered over the past five years that enabled us to develop a genuinely unique and alternative approach to Sustainable Tourism

Development (STD) education, learning and inquiry, and map out what we see as the essential theoretical and practical elements of that concept of learning. The numerous projects the students have carried out have also enabled us to also better understand, from a research perspective, the nuances of process that make up STD. Aligned with Chapter 2, our point of departure is that STD is a process and not the development of a specific tourism product or outcome (Liburd, 2010; 2018). Our research has revealed that by further unfolding this notion, one can say that STD is a process that fosters new relationships and interactions between stakeholders and practitioners, and that through these interactions a range of perspectives are brought to bear on a tourism endeavour or situation that can reveal aspects that might otherwise be overlooked, and engender concepts, strategies and outcomes that shift what STD can achieve.

We have primarily worked with three interrelated theoretical approaches: Collaborative Design, Complex Processes of Relating and Educating Attention, which in turn have been interwoven as a concept we describe as Participatory Inquiry. In our interactions with the students we have striven to engage them with an understanding of skilled practice that enables them to develop the necessary skills, values, competencies and knowledge to become philosophical practitioners. This chapter will briefly introduce our three theoretical departure points, unpack them in more detail with examples of learning situations to finally, and on that basis, describe our concept of participatory inquiry and its relation to STD.

Whilst we acknowledge that Heron and Reason (1997) have used the term 'participatory inquiry', they do so by considering it as a paradigm in itself, which we choose not to do. Our understanding rests more in a complex relational and pragmatic understanding of doing inquiry where all participants are interdependent on each other within a field of inquiry. This differs from an understanding of action research and the idea of participatory inquiry as described by Reason and Bradbury (2008) that draws on systems thinking. As Stacey and Griffin (2005) notice about systems theory perspectives, researchers are sometimes understood as standing outside the system, the field of inquiry, and from that position observe, design or reflect, and sometimes as being part of the system. As will become clearer below, an emphasis on the interdependency of participatory inquiry informs our process of doing STD as a *designing with* and not a *designing for*!

We are for the most, two faculty: a professor and a design research consultant. We also invite two students from the previous year to act as tutors who can either independently supervise the student groups or act as assistants to the professor or consultant.

Collaborative design

Central to the development of our STD education has been the introduction of collaborative design (co-design). Co-design contributes a unique range of processes, methods, tools and an attitude of mind and perception that enables its practitioners, with others, to explore, reveal, encompass and address issues and nuances in an overall sustainable tourism development process. Co-design is a social practice where participants relate to the dynamic and iterative nature of the task in hand where outcomes emerge from the social interactions of those involved (Buur & Larsen, 2010; Heape, 2007; Minneman, 1991). This understanding deliberately challenges the notion that a development process can be planned and micro-managed with pre-determined outcomes.

Complex processes of relating

Our STD educational practice is highly influenced by a focus on complex responsive processes of relating as initiated by Stacey et al. (2000), Stacey (2001 & 2003) and Shaw and Stacey (2006). Based on theories of George Herbert Mead (1934) and Norbert Elias (1956), they understand social interaction as transformative. This perspective understands the sociality of people's collective actions and participatory practice by noticing the complex and processual nature of human knowing, doing, making, relating and organising. "For Mead, the source of variation lay in the gesture and response structure of interaction between organisms. Variation, with its potential for transformation, arises in the micro detail of interactions" between people (Stacey et al., 2000: 43). Sense-making, sense-giving and understanding emerge from the ongoing interactions between interdependent people involved in collective doings in specific situations (Heape et al., 2015), where "practices change in the emergent processes of negotiating new meaning, new opportunities, new insights, new thinking and new doing" (Larsen & Sproedt, 2013: 2).

Educating attention

The education of attention was a term originally introduced by James Gibson (1979) as a fine-tuning or sensitisation of the entire perceptual system to particular features of the environment (Gibson, 1979: 246-8). Tim Ingold (2017: 2-4) points out that "education is a practice of attention, not of transmission – that it is through attention that knowledge is both generated and carried on... We can – in a sense – travel the same paths and, in so doing, make meaning together. It is not that you end with a piece of knowledge implanted in your mind that once had belonged only to me; rather we come into a concordance that is new to both of us. Education is transformative." This closely relates to Lave and Wenger