14 Reflections on Research Paradigms:
Their relationship to understanding and facilitating collaboration for sustainable tourism development

Gayle R. Jennings

"The future of humanity and of our planet lies in our hands."

(United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015: 14)

Wicked problems of the world—poverty, health and wellbeing, equality, climate change, refugee crises, sustainability, … ; continue to challenge humankind. Despite decades of collaborations, partnerships, policies and research, these wicked problems remain primarily unresolved and manifold. This is not unexpected as this is inherent in the nature of wicked problems. As Horst Rittel (1967 in Churchman, 1967) and Rittel and Webber (1973) noted, wicked problems are marked by the inability to provide a universal solution and a universal research approach. Instead the problems are context specific and continually transmogrify – there is no end point. In addition, they can overlap, interrelate, interconnect and intersect. In framing the nature of a wicked problem, the knowledge sets and experiences, social situatedness, respective insider- or outsider-ness and worldviews of the various stakeholders involved play critical roles with regard to how the problem is addressed. They inform and shape what is given attention and why; what is included or excluded and why; as well as the methodologies and methods used. Every attempt to address a wicked problem leaves a legacy including repercussions and unintended consequences. There is no undoing of actions. As four of the manifold stakeholders concerned with wicked problems, researchers, planners, designers and practitioners have the task of "improv[ing] some [of the] characteristics of the world where people live …" (Rittel & Webber, 1973:167). These four stakeholders, like all stakeholders, are responsible for the consequences of their actions and ongoing ramifications associated with the redress of wicked

problems. Unlike traditional "scientized" (Xiang, 2013: 2) linear approaches used to address solvable, or 'tame', problems; non-linear, social process-based problem-solving approaches are required for wicked problems. Rather than outcomes being supported/not supported or validated/not validated in the case of tame problems, strategies used to address wicked problems are usually evaluated using criteria, such as "better or worse", and are always influenced by stakeholder viewpoints (Rittel & Webber, 1973:163). As a consequence of the nature of wicked problems, there is no 'quick fix' or easy way to address these 'malignant', 'vicious', 'tricky', 'aggressive' – wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973:160).

In the beginning decades of the 21st century, some wicked problems have been reclassified as 'super wicked problems'. Based on Rittel and Webber's (1973) description of wicked problems, super wicked problems are further denoted by four characteristics: "time is running out; those who cause the problem also seek to provide the solution; the central authority needed to address them is weak or non-existent; and irrational discounting occurs that pushes responses into the future" (Levin et al., 2012:124). The key super wicked problem that this book addresses is sustainable development, specifically, the related wicked problem of sustainable tourism development and the means by which collaboration can support resilient action towards facilitating tourism development that is inherently sustainable. The various chapters in this book present critical reflections on research actions undertaken in the spirit of fostering sustainable tourism development. As such, the chapters offer critical insights into the consequences and affect of those research actions.

This chapter, however, takes a step back from these exemplars. Rather than focus on completed research, this chapter reflects on the suite of research paradigms that can inform researchers, planners, designers, practitioners, indeed all stakeholders, with regard to engaging in resilient action founded on collaboration to facilitate sustainable tourism development. Knowledge of this suite of paradigms and their respective tenets, especially the paradigms that best serve action, collaboration and facilitation can then act as a tool to mitigate against the various social processes that generate, ratify, and reinforce practices that are counterproductive to overall global sustainability. For some, it may mean an upskilling in paradigmatic knowledge, experience and practice, for others, a need to extend the same, and for still others, it may be a (re)affirmation of their paradigmatic practices.

At the core of collaboration is stakeholder meaning-making engagement—essentially a dynamic, social process. Subsequently, all researchers, planners, designers and practitioners need to evaluate their intra-, interpersonal, cross-cultural, team, leadership and facilitation skills sets in order to effectively

participate in such dynamism (Jennings, 2007a & b, 2009, 2018a; Brundiers et al., 2010). Again, for some, it may mean an upskilling in these skills sets, for others, a need to extend the same, and for still others, it may be a (re)affirmation of their practices. Moreover, such evaluation should be undertaken by all participants/stakeholders. If skills are lacking, then time needs to be spent to skill or upskill all participants/stakeholders in order that they are 'collaboratively ready'! Elsewhere, this may be referred to as 'capacity building'. But before addressing paradigmatic knowledge, practice and skill sets and complementary social engagement skill sets; I want to return to the super wicked problem of sustainability, and the wicked problem of sustainable tourism development to provide some background for the arguments presented in this chapter. I also want to define the concepts collaboration, partnership, collaborative partnership, and resilience to contextualise their use or later lack of use in this chapter.

Sustainability, sustainable tourism development, related definitions and research issues

> *"meanings differ across time, across societies, cultures* (Urry, 1990, 2002), *nation states, … as well as between individuals"* (Jennings, 2007b: 261)

Despite the fact that "[c]oncepts of stewardship of … land, resources, and interconnectivity of all things—that is, sustainable practices—have informed indigenous peoples' ways of life for hundreds of years" (Jennings, 2007c:225), within the western English-speaking world, attention to such 'stewardship' only became more pronounced in the later decades of the 1900s. Meadows and her co-researchers (1972) provided one of the earliest research-based sustainability framings that highlighted the finite nature of resources and 'limits to growth'. Almost a decade later, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, the World Wildlife Fund, and the United Nations Environment Program (IUCN, WWF & UNEP, 1980) offered another framing, which focussed on the need for 'sustainable utilization' and 'sustainable development'. In that same decade, one of the better-known and oft utilised sustainability framings, the 1987 Brundtland Report, also known as *Our Common Future*, was promulgated. This report defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Despite the alerts that these framings identified, and World Summits held on sustainable development, for example, in Rio 1992, and Johannesburg in 2002; goals set failed to be achieved. And, of course, not only does this reflect the nature of (super) wicked problems but also the aspirational and broad parameters of goal setting/statements as well