

Critical issues in tourism co-creation

Historical antecedents, definitional issues and disciplinary influences

‘Co-creation’ is a relatively new label for a range of collaborative practices, many of which have been discussed at length in tourism scholarship (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Jamal & Getz, 1999). In its most basic conceptualisation, and for the purpose of this Special Issue, co-creation refers to collaborative, participatory practices whereby multiple, and often diverse, actors help to produce something of value together. Basing their arguments on simple database searches focusing on a narrow set of terms, some researchers argue that ‘co-creation’ has only just started to emerge in the last decades. Without taking stock of the rich historical lines of research and identifying its lineage within other fields of study including planning, community engagement, sociology, international development and so on, some have argued that co-creation is innovative – a new way to undertake research and engage with actors. In the process, binaries are broken down between researcher and subject, and there is a blurring of distinctions between problem and action, and process and outcome. Co-creation in this sense captures the notion of ‘co-labour-ation’.

Other researchers (e.g. Bason, 2010) associate co-creation with user-driven innovation, demand-driven innovation, customer-driven innovation, human-centred design, interaction design and so on. Usurped into business and management studies, this discourse tends to be closely associated with ideals such as economic innovation, efficiency, timeliness, effective participation that are generally associated with neoliberal values such as shared responsibility, public–private partnerships and capacity building (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Zwick, Bonsu, & Darmody, 2008; Terblanche, 2014). It was this uneven and blinkered approach to the emergent term ‘co-creation’, and the lack of acknowledgement of the interdisciplinary origins of diverse applications of collaboration in tourism, that provided the initial inspiration for this Special Issue.

Within this Issue of *Tourism Recreation Research*, we have sought to excavate and acknowledge the deeper historical antecedents, and how this emergent term

‘co-creation’ might also be understood as a re-interpretation of long standing values associated with community empowerment, collaboration, and the (re)democratisation of planning and policy processes, and which are well established in planning theory and interactive planning and problem-solving pedagogies (e.g. see Bosman & Dredge, 2015; Dredge & Hales, 2012; Phi, Whitford, & Dredge, 2017). The term ‘co-creation’ also makes use of long-established discussions about knowledge production and dynamics, where different types of knowledge (e.g. explicit (written, encoded, etc.) and tacit (e.g. embrained, encultured, embodied)) co-exist, coalesce and feed off one another to be valued by stakeholders in different ways (see Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Dredge & Jenkins, 2011). In essence then, our interest was bringing together diverse interpretations of co-creation and collaboration in tourism and to explore how these have influenced our understanding of tourism governance, planning, knowledge dynamics, production and consumption, community empowerment, international development and so on. We wanted to move the discussion beyond service-dominant logic, which is where co-creation in tourism has been so narrowly focused for the last few years.

Co-creation and the human–nature interface

The position above is that the concept of co-creation – the working together to produce or create something of value – is much older dimension of the co-operative and collaborative human condition. Co-creation, collaboration, shared production, partnerships and co-operation similarly capture the idea that value is produced by working together. Yet in taking this approach we should also be aware that the value produced may have positive and/or negative value, and the determination of that value is different for different actors. Moreover, the co-creation process might be organic and emergent, such as an experimental action, or it might be carefully anticipated, designed and produced, such as in the case of a tourism planning framework (see Dredge, Ford, & Whitford, 2011).

But there are also exciting advances that have emerged in the concept of co-creation, and that have prompted us to think differently, that we need to acknowledge. In particular, an important development emerging from co-creation discussions has been to shine the light on what is produced from co-labouration. The outcome or product could be tangible, such as a policy or agreed action, or it could be intangible such as social, economic or cultural value, trust, knowledge or understanding. Co-creation can be transformative, producing new hybrid actors – human and non-human (Haraway, 2015). As a result, discussions of co-creation prompt us to reorder our very human perspective on the world and to try to understand from the perspective of Nature, for example (Chakraborty, 2019).

The work of Haraway and others suggest that what is produced might also create new hybrid things. With their own influence and agency, the best-known example of this new hybrid actor is the Great Pacific Gyre, a complex actor in its own right, produced through complex physical, economic, chemical, environmental and human interactions (Ballantyne & Varey, 2015). What is clear from this discussion is that co-creation is that we also need to extend our thinking about co-creation into the realm of interactions between human and non-human things. These developments highlight that co-creation also has moral and ethical dimensions; we must engage with the diverse and often complex outcomes, whether they are positive or negative or both; and what we value, how we value and who values what is produced. In taking this approach, we must also remain alert to the way in which the emergence of new philosophical directions in the humanities and social sciences, such as post-structuralism and post-humanism, are adding to and deepening our understandings of co-creation as a process of becoming together. We have tried to embrace these new directions as well as more established investigations of co-creation in tourism in this Special Issue.

Contributions in this special issue

The call for papers for this special issue brought together a range of contributions not only from diverse geographical, developmental, scalar and temporal contexts but also they were co-created by diverse authors from both the academy and beyond (e.g., business administrator, biologist, policy manager, social entrepreneur).

Phi and Dredge unpack the historical roots and characteristics of co-creation from seven threads of scholarship, which provide a broader umbrella to expand the understanding of co-creation in tourism. Among these

threads, co-creation from a post-human perspective is explored further by Bertella, Fumagalli & Williams-Grey in their research on wildlife tourism. Utilising the case of swim-with-dolphins tour, these authors suggest that wild animals can potentially become the key actor in co-creating knowledge relevant for wildlife tourism management. Their research also emphasises the role of empathy between human and non-human actors as the starting point for effective co-creation processes beyond a human-centred approach.

Three other papers approach co-creation using participatory, action-oriented research and problem-solving methodologies. Wengel, McIntosh and Cockburn-Wootten suggest that the Ketso method can be an important tool to add to the suit of existing collaborative methodologies. Along the same line, Boluk, Muldoon and Johnson critically explore Integrated Curriculum Design as a creative pedagogical tool to co-instruct and co-learn with diverse community partners. Jernsand examines co-creation in 'student living labs', demonstrating the value of open innovation and experimentation in action research. Though diverse in the approaches, methodologies and tools used, these papers clearly demonstrate that binaries are breaking down, and concurrently, the blurring of lines between researcher and subject, the problem and solution, process and action.

The last two papers approach co-creation through the values of small tourism firms. Garcia-Rosell, Haanpää and Janhunen offer a more comprehensive understanding of value co-creation processes in small tourism firms by drawing upon cultural marketing and organisational improvisation. Tomassini further expands the topic by highlighting the co-creation of an ethical vision of non-commercially oriented tourism firms, and their contribution to co-creating alternative values and paradigms in tourism with regard to development, growth, citizenship and entrepreneurship.

Three major themes emerge from these papers. First, the papers contribute to challenge the idea that useful knowledge is only produced by scientific communities. Rather co-creation is conceived as a metaphor for a range of established research practices and approaches that bridge the gap between science and society, where the researchers are positioned as facilitators and co-creators rather than lone experts (see e.g. Wengel, McIntosh & Cockburn-Wootten). Second, co-creation in tourism can generate positive values for diverse range of actors involved, including both human and non-human actors. Third, through taking a critical approach towards co-creation, the special issue also cautions readers that co-creation processes may not always produce positive values. Insufficient awareness of the relational characteristics of actors involved in the co-

creation process (e.g. equality, emotions, power) may be breeding grounds for value co-destruction, instead of value co-creation, in tourism context (e.g., Phi & Dredge; Garcia-Rosell, Haanpää & Janhunen). Thus, in excavating co-creation from historical, multi-disciplinary and multi-actor perspectives, this Special Issue seeks to lay the foundations for a more comprehensive examination of value co-creation in future tourism research, in order to fully realise tourism's potential as a powerful co-creative social force for good.


Finally, in the journey of developing this Special Issue, we also acknowledge a certain cynicism among those that might see the term 'co-creation' as part of a language game played within academia, where labelling and concept claiming can be used by researchers to boost citations, improve metrics and consolidate one's scholarly reputation. In the process, historical threads of theoretical development are discarded and scholarly publishing falls into faddishness. It is our ambition in this Special Issue to transcend such practices, and to recognise that working together to produce value, collaborative understanding, and joint outputs is fundamental to addressing the complex challenges we face. In this special issue, we encourage readers to engage critically with the term 'co-creation', to recognise related elements such as co-design and co-production, and to acknowledge not only the contributions stemming from diverse disciplines, but also the innovative future inherent in collaborative working. The Anthropocene demands that we de-centre our human perspective, to exercise empathy and to acknowledge the rights of Nature. Co-creation has an enormous contribution to make in this regard, because it implores us to think about the co-design, co-creation and co-production of tourism *with* Nature, and not simply as based on, or exploiting, Nature.

References

- Ballantyne, D., & Varey, R. J. (2006). Creating value-in-use through marketing interactions: The exchange logic of relating, communicating, and knowing. *Marketing Theory*, 6(3), 335–348. doi:10.1177/1470593106066795
- Bason, C. (2010). Design thinking in government. In *Leading public sector innovation: Co-creating for a better society* (pp.135–149). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Bosman, C., & Dredge, D. (2015). *Teaching about tourism in a post-disciplinary planning context*. In D. Dredge, D. Airey, & M.J. Gros (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of tourism and hospitality education* (pp. 265–278). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Bramwell, B., & Lane, B. (2011). *Critical perspectives on governance and sustainability*. London: Routledge.
- Chakraborty, A. (2019). Does Nature matter? Arguing for a bio-physical turn in the ecotourism narrative. *Journal of Ecotourism*, doi:10.1080/14724049.2019.1584201
- Dredge, D., & Hales, R. (2012). Community case study research. In L. Dwyer, A. Gill, & N. Seetaram (Eds.), *Handbook of research methods in tourism: Quantitative and qualitative approaches* (pp. 417–437). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Dredge, D., & Jenkins, J. (2011). New spaces of tourism policy and planning. In D. Dredge, & J. Jenkins (Eds.), *Stories of practice: Tourism planning and policy* (pp. 1–12). Surrey: Ashgate.
- Dredge, D., Ford, E.-J., & Whitford, M. (2011). The managing local tourism master class: Building sustainable management practices across local government divides. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 11(2), 101–116.
- Haraway, D. (2015). Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene. Donna Haraway in conversation with Martha Kenney. In H. Davis, & E. Turpin (Eds.), *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among aesthetics, politics, environments and epistemologies* (pp. 255–269). London: Open Humanities Press.
- Jamal, T., & Getz, D. (1999). Community roundtables for tourism-related conflicts: the dialectics of consensus and process structures. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 7(3–4), 290–313.
- Nonaka, I., & Takeuchi, H. (1995). *The knowledge-creating company: How Japanese companies create the dynamics of innovation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Phi, G. T., Whitford, M., & Dredge, D. (2017). Knowledge dynamics in the tourism - social entrepreneurship nexus. In P. Sheldon, & R. Daniele (Eds.), *Tourism and Social Entrepreneurship: Philosophy and Practice* (pp. 155–172). Cham: Springer.
- Terblanche, N. S. (2014). Some theoretical perspectives of co-creation and co-production of value by customers. *Acta Commercii*, 14, 2, Art. #237, 8 pages. doi:10.4102/ac.v14i2.237
- Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2004). Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(1), 1–17. doi:10.1509/jmkg.68.1.1.24036
- Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2008). Service-dominant logic: Continuing the evolution. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 36(1), 1–10. doi:10.1007/s11747-007-0069-6
- Zwick, D., Bonsu, S. K., & Darmody, A. (2008). Putting consumers to work: "Co-creation" and new marketing governmentality. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 8(2), 163–196. doi:10.1177/1469540508090089

Giang Phi

Department of Culture & Global Studies, Aalborg University,
Denmark

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2359-2833>

Dianne Dredge

Department of Services Management and Services Studies,
Lund University, Sweden & Founder, The Tourism, CoLab,
Australia

 together@thetourismcolab.com.au

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0151-0382>