



CONSULTING ETHICS

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Abstract: An important, if much neglected, arena within the field of tourism studies is the role of tourism scholars as consultants in the development process. For individuals within this field of ‘expert knowledge’ participation in consultancy projects often places them at the heart of complex and competing interests at local, national and international level. Such complexity necessitates ethically informed decisions. In this paper I first explore the evolution of tourism related research and consultancy, before considering the rise of ethics in arenas of professional practice. Further, I consider the Foucauldian construct of ‘technologies of the self’ as potentially offering an ethical response predicated upon the creative authoring of the self. **Keywords:** consultancy, ethics, Foucault, technologies of the self, truth. © 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Whether conceived of as an industry or as a social phenomenon, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, tourism is an activity of undisputed significance (Tribe, 2009). The business of tourism, motivated primarily by economic considerations, continues to expand its influence to the extent that today tourism penetrates the most remote and inhospitable regions of the globe. This exponential growth has been driven, in part at least, by the burgeoning demands of consumers for tourism products and services in pursuance of leisured experiences. Under neoliberal development philosophies tourism is often regarded as the ‘preferred industry’ in terms of employment generation and exports. Indeed, the most common justification for the promotion of tourism is its potential contribution to development, particularly in the context of developing countries (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008, p. 2). While governments, development agencies and investors point to the importance of tourism as a potential engine for economic development and growth, as well as for positive socio-cultural and environmental

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outcomes, there are also criticisms of tourism as a cause of friction and alienation within local communities, resulting in negative impacts on destination populations and on natural environments (Crick, 1989; Holden, 2009; Lea, 1993).

As technological and resource gaps between developed and developing economies continue to widen, tourism related development is positioned at the intersection of ‘global flows’ (Appadurai, 1996; Meethan, 2001) which tend to reinforce imbalances in access to, and utilization of, resources. As the public and private sectors focus on developing natural and cultural resources for tourism, there is a growing demand for all manner of specialist consultants in a constellation of development fields. Participation in tourism related developments, which emerge from systems of governance linked to global transformations in fiscal and trade policies, often place members of research/consultancy teams at the heart of complex and competing interests at local, national and international/multinational level(s). Thus, those engaged as *tourism consultants* (hereafter TCs) are often drawn into a force-field of relations of institutional interests, public policy priorities, investment imperatives, cultural values, and professional standards within which they must negotiate a range of moral implications associated with their practice. As emerging changes in global consciousness demand responses to contemporary challenges such as climate change, consumerism, globalization, sustainability and social alienation, we are increasingly drawn into debates of what it is to be ‘good’ (ethical).

This article focuses on the social character of professional relations in tourism consultancy, and the ethical enterprise of managing these. It is suggested that existing structures of neoliberal rationalization (of which tourism is constituted in the political, economic, social and cultural life of communities, regional and nations), have constrained access to *truth* and under such conditions TCs have at hand the possibility of constructing and articulating the ethical subject as a productive outcome of institutional constraints or discipline. It is argued that the onus for ethical practice is likely to increasingly fall upon individual TCs, thus they will inevitably need to confront questions relating to the ethical perspective embraced and how individual “ethics-work” might connect with the social world. What form such responses might take or how they would be supported is open for debate. The subject positions of TCs and the ethical challenges which inevitably confront them and how they might respond to such challenges occupies an important domain in critical tourism studies and one which can be informed by the ethical theorizing of Michel Foucault and his “excavations” of the ethical subject in which he encouraged those most closely involved in a domain of practice or inquiry to address problems of truth, power and conduct. Foucault insisted that ethics work should emerge from *practice*—“I don’t write for an audience, I write for users, not readers” (Foucault, 1974, pp. 523–524). Focusing on ethics in consulting practice in tourism planning and development, and selecting from Foucault’s “gadgets”, in this article and as a stimulus to further thought and debate, I speculate about the utility of Foucauldian ethics as an approach to consultancy practice through the Socratic idea of

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