Critical Perspectives

Transcending towards a spirituality-based platform in tourism higher education: A contemplation of the pedagogical implications

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ABSTRACT

In light of current global challenges, there is a need to re-orientate and re-envision tourism education to develop responsible future practitioners. This paper argues for a move beyond the current vocationally biased academic approach and to move towards an educational platform that is inclusive of ethics, values and spirituality. A spirituality-based platform is proposed as a way forward in tourism higher education to facilitate a transformative learning experience. A spiritually based educational philosophy will influence the pedagogical approaches employed within the tourism curriculum and requires the academe to go beyond the transmission of knowledge and engage learners' transformative spirit.

1. Introduction

Tourism has been described as a world-making force that has a creative and transformative role in positively contributing towards people and places, facilitating peace and cross-cultural understanding and in the creation of meanings, values and compassion for humanity (Hollinshead, 2007). Purposeful management of tourism can contribute constructively towards improving social and economic well-being and empower communities (Kelly, 2006). However, if there is a focus on tourism as an economic powerhouse, considerable impacts and issues can result and extend beyond the economic domains to the social and ecological environments. Sustainability of the physical and human environment has become a priority in the international political agenda as the world witnesses the damaging impacts of human activities and development especially through the rapid development of the tourism industry (Chawla, 2015). In light of global challenges, there is a dire need for increased consciousness among tourism professionals to be responsible stewards and to become more aware of the multi-disciplinary character of their profession.

As a critical change agency and a source of innovative thinking, higher education is deemed as a vehicle for enabling positive change in mind sets, skills and knowledge in students (Tribe, 2002) and contributing to the creation of new knowledge and paradigms (Bekessy & Burgman, 2003; Sheldon, Fesenmaier, & Tribe, 2011). This critical role necessitates a paradigm shift in the purpose of education (Fien, 2002; Tilbury, 1995) and a reorientation of the nature of what is taught and how it is taught (Wallis & Steptoe, 2006). Orr (1992) argues that it is not education that will save us but education of a certain kind, implying a need for a change in the content and pedagogy of the education curriculum and the purpose of learning itself.

Tourism education has advanced considerably in the last 50 years and has 'come of age' (Airey, 2005, p.13). While there is an increasing interest among tourism academics and a growing scholarship that is focused on the nature and purpose of future tourism education (Inui, Wheeler, & Lankford, 2006; Jamal, 2004; Tribe, 2008; Mckercher, 2002) the scholarly literature focusing on

curriculum issues and the pressures and changes affecting the education sector is still scant (Airey, Dredge, & Gross, 2015). At this point of maturity in tourism higher education, it is imperative to research and study the future direction of tourism education, the nature and direction of knowledge and the associated academic approaches (Airey, 2008). The time has arrived where the pivotal role of tourism education is being questioned and there is a need to review the future direction.

Tourism curriculum is a contested construct that is largely influenced by the different views and values of stakeholders. Empirical methods which are generally value free are inadequate to evaluate the diverse aims, values and purposes of tourism education (Tribe, 2005). Critical questions pertaining to "what is the curriculum for? "; "what are the purposes of the curriculum" and "what is it preparing the students for? " (Tribe, 2015, pp 20–21) cannot be comprehensively addressed by empirical research. They need conceptual (Xin, Tribe, & Chambers, 2013) and philosophical contemplation (Tribe, 2015). However, currently there is limited conceptual research work in tourism studies despite its valuable contribution to academic knowledge and tourism industry applications (Xin et al., 2013).

This conceptual paper endeavours to provide an original contribution to tourism knowledge by identifying the opportunity for a new spirituality-based platform to situate tourism education. Rather than limiting the "field of vision" to what currently exists in literature, this paper "seeks to discover what might be" (Tribe, 2002, p.340). Historical research is undertaken to examine the advancement of tourism education in the last five decades and philosophical research investigates the metaphysical dimensions that have influenced tourism education. The various definitions of spirituality are discussed and the challenges to integrating spirituality in higher education are raised. A strong argument has been put forward to centre spirituality in tourism education and the paper concludes by presenting pedagogical implications and tools that tourism educators can consider and adopt to foster spirituality within the context of their curriculum.

2. Philosophical foundations in tourism curriculum design

Curriculum can be defined as "…all those activities designed or encouraged within the school's organisational framework to promote the intellectual, personal, social and physical development of its pupils" (Morrison & Ridley, 1988, p. 2). It is the "whole educational experience packaged as a degree program" and includes the knowledge, skills, assessment, as well as learning experiences (Tribe, 2002, p. 339).

It is essential to critique curriculum and reflect on the philosophical perspectives when planning curriculum design (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009; Tribe, 2005). A reflection and awareness of the philosophical issues and underpinnings will serve to situate higher educational institutions into an appropriate philosophical context in the process of knowledge construction and curriculum development in tourism education (Oktadiana & Chon, 2016). Fundamental questions regarding the goals, aims and meanings of tourism education would dictate the whole educational experience, influencing the various components of any course curriculum (i.e., modules; course content and methods of delivery). The philosophical assumptions of curriculum planners and educators will have a resulting influence on pedagogical approaches employed within the tourism and hospitality curriculum which will in turn have a direct impact on tourism curriculum and education (Dredge et al., 2012). Views about the nature and purpose of education (ideology) and the nature of the subject (epistemology) influence approaches to teaching (pedagogy), which in turn influence how learners experience the curriculum (Littledyke, 2007). Bernstein (1971) indicated that students' educational journeys differ according to how the curriculum is framed or influenced by curriculum planners' philosophical perspectives. Different framings inevitably mean that students will exit, as future industry practitioners, with a different range of ideas, attitudes and competencies. However, the lack of academic discourse and engagement of tourism scholars on ideological perspectives of tourism education is disturbing (L'Espoir Decosta & Grunewald, 2011).

Given the importance of educational philosophy in determining curriculum design, it is surprising that little tourism literature discusses aims and values that frame tourism curriculum and education (Fidgeon, 2010). Phillimore & Goodson (2004, p.4) have indicated that "tourism scholars have generally been more hesitant in … developing their understanding of the philosophical and theoretical process that underpins knowledge production and practices". The current resistance to philosophical engagement and entanglement in the tourism academy is not justifiable in the contemporary world where there is an urgent need for critical societies (Tribe, 2010). Philosophical concerns should be central to curriculum development (Oktadiana & Chon, 2016) as philosophical deliberations present appropriate frameworks for an academic institution's goals and purposes, curriculum content, pedagogical and assessment methods as well as teaching and learning experiences (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009; Tribe, 2015). Critical tourism scholars need to have the philosophic ambition and intellectual courage to rigorously contemplate and reflect on how tourism education can transcend towards a transformative education.

2.1. Ideology

Ideology refers to the system of ideas and beliefs of an individual or groups which provides a general direction to educational policies (Littledyke, 2007). Curriculum is socially constructed (Tribe, 2001) and the curriculum space defines/frames the scope of knowledge, skills and attitudes that is included (or excluded) and represents the interests and power of the various influencers. Dredge et al.'s (2012) Curriculum Space Framework explains how the curriculum in academic institutions is negotiated and strategic choices are made on what to include based on the ideological beliefs of the different stakeholders and their perceptions of necessary learning outcomes. Tourism education stakeholders need to deliberate carefully on what is worthwhile in tourism education (L'Espoir Decosta & Grunewald, 2011) and this necessitates philosophical and sociological analysis of tourism education and the industry.