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Annals of Tourism Research

Invited Article

Creating and curating tourism knowledge

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This article examines the factors that lead to the creation of quality research and those that enable that research to be robustly yet fairly curated through the journal system. It approaches this problem mainly as an autoethnography presented as a critical professional reflection. This is enriched by triangulation with other experts in the field. The issues are significant since the canon of tourism is advanced at the very place where the creation of knowledge comes up against its curation. Its original contribution is to reveal and to make explicit norms and processes which have often been tacit or hidden or taken for granted and uninspected. Further its findings are translated into a series of practical tips and recommendations.

Introduction

Tourism research is nothing if not prolific. Every year its many journals publish hundreds of new academic papers. Its researchers travel the world to communicate their work through multiple conference sessions. Its sizable army of PhD students add ever more theses to the library shelves. Yet in a recent article, Airey, Tribe, Benckendorff, and Xiao (2015) questioned the quality of tourism research concluding that "many parts of the academy unknowingly promulgate inferior research … [and] that we are in danger of misjudging ourselves to be excellent" (p. 10). This questioning of the quality of tourism research provides the broad rationale for this study in which the author reflects on his professional experiences and particularly his ten years as editor in chief of *Annals of Tourism Research* with a particular focus on the intersection of three aspects of tourism research. These are the creation and authoring of knowledge, the curating of knowledge through the activities of journals and the resulting legitimised published trail of cutting edge research which tops up the canon of the subject. The purpose of the article is to offer an unpacking of both the tacit and explicit factors involved in creating, curating and legitimising knowledge so that those involved may be better advised and prepared. A series of 21 tips for authors and 11 recommendations for the journal are offered in the light of the analysis. Since one of the more elusive components of research excellence is originality, special attention is given to this area.

The rest of the article is divided into five parts. It commences with an outline of its method. Next the main body discusses its main areas of interest under the headings of legitimising, creating knowledge and curating knowledge. Finally a conclusion is offered.

Method

The method for this article is a hybrid one. It is mainly conducted as an autoethnography (Ellis, Adams, & Bichner, 2010). The material for this qualitative research technique is personal experience. In this case it is harvested from a specific set of the author's professional experiences. Those are the experiences of being Editor-in-Chief of *Annals* for ten years, being an evaluator of research on each of the past two UK national research assessment exercises, namely RAE 2008 and REF 2014, and being a senior tourism academic. So the method is a focussed critical professional reflection. The ethnographic materials used for the paper are from three

Table 1
Panel of researchers.

Pauline Sheldon	Erik Cohen
Dean MacCannell	Dennison Nash
Myriam Jansen-Verbeke	John Urry
Josef Mazanec	Graham Dann
Valene Smith	Marie-Françoise Lanfant

sources. The first source is the author's evaluation of around 4500 academics papers of which around 500 were submitted to the national research exercises (RAE and REF) and 4000 to *Annals of Tourism Research*. The second source relates to the insider knowledge of systems and processes accessible to the author as Editor-in-Chief of *Annals*. The third source is the author's expert knowledge of the academic world of tourism gleaned through roles such as Head of Department, Chair of The Association for Tourism in Higher Education, Co-Chair of the UNWTO Education Council and member of the Association of Business Schools' Journal Ranking Panel. The autoethnographic nature of the method brings the important benefit that there is no communication gap between the researcher and the researched since they are the same person. This part of the process was effectively an internal dialogue (by the author) with an expert, key informant (of the author). Member checking was therefore redundant since data was captured in the author's memory and retained and recounted with a full richness and no loss through intermediation. The autoethnography was augmented by triangulation with biographical and autobiographical accounts of a panel of ten experienced tourism researchers. The basis for their selection was that these researchers had both created knowledge as eminent authors and curated knowledge as current or past resource editors of *Annals*. They offer insightful personal reflections on many of the key points that are made. The panel of academics referenced can be found in Table 1 and in the text their names are identified in bold fonts and their words are presented in italics.

"Data analysis" in autoethnography consists of critical reflection to connect the personal experiences to wider cultural, social and political practices and produce new understandings. The analysis was informed by the author's expert knowledge of epistemological issues and relevant literature. The data was organised into the two major themes of creating knowledge and curating knowledge, prompted by the general aim of the enquiry which is to understand the relationship between academic authors, journals and knowledge creation with special reference to *Annals of Tourism Research*. The research process was guided by the qualitative research principles of truthfulness, credibility, plausibility and triangulation. There are no substantive ethical issues as all of the remarks quoted are already in the public domain.

Legitimising knowledge

My long interest in epistemology and the development of tourism as an academic subject goes back to my PhD. Much of this was devoted to understanding how this newish academic subject worked and led to the publication of *The Indiscipline of Tourism* (Tribe, 1997). So my appointment as the new *Annals* editor in 2008 was an exciting opportunity for me. I was suddenly and delightfully involved in not just the theory of knowledge production but immersed in the practice of it too.

The question about how new knowledge is minted is a fascinating one and the current (2018) debates about "fake news" make it even more important. We learn early in our careers from our research methods texts what distinguishes academic research from say journalism, consulting or even writing novels. We learn the grounds for warranted belief in a truth claim. The model of scientific progress is a typical starting point. We test theories about the world and those that are supported by empirical evidence and survive attempts at falsification are accepted into the canon of a subject.

Well that's the theory. But what about the practice? It turns out that in practice there is no objective measuring device or set of scales which automatically sifts good knowledge from bad knowledge. Our research results and conclusions cannot be machine read and evaluated for the truth. Rather we must set out our research for others to judge. So knowledge quality control, like research itself, turns out to be a human activity. It is journals that discharge this key role in knowledge production since they provide the screening of knowledge at the heart of which is expert, blind, peer review. So it is the quality of our research, writing it up, and the quality of our journal evaluation procedures that are crucial ingredients in determining what knowledge survives this process. In other words there is another layer added to the research process: It is not the evidence and method that by themselves transform research into knowledge. Rather that research has to be written (created in a particular format) to be evaluated by others (curated).

Creating knowledge

It is the job of academics to publish. Publishing should be both their natural and core activities. Without an active research programme, individual academics will not flourish and the academic subject of tourism would ossify and wither. Alongside this intellectual interest there are strong managerial forces within departments, universities and at government levels that seek to incentivise, oversee and monitor research programmes. Each of these interests, the intellectual and the managerial, create different dynamics within the research and publishing environment. The intellectual interest may be driven by a desire to solve a problem, to better understand or explain phenomena in the field. The managerial interest can be more extrinsically driven by a desire for quantity and ranking and may foster a different strategy in researchers. In this case the starting point may be "I need to publish five articles in the next five years in quality journals". Inevitably, articles driven by each of these interests arrive in the inbox at *Annals*.

Annals is a top rated journal across many global indices and evaluation systems and with that comes an implicit recognition of the