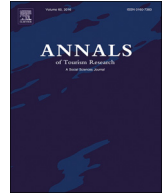


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## “Bring the numbers and stories together”: Valuing events

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## ABSTRACT

This article introduces a Valuation Studies approach, in which valuation is seen as a social practice, to studying the outcomes of events. Drawing on material gathered around the Arctic Winter Games organized in Nuuk, Greenland in 2016, we exemplify how researchers working together across disciplinary and methodological boundaries can engage together with events stakeholders in making event values knowable beyond the confines of traditional evaluation. Analytically, we use Callons' concepts on framing and overflows to exemplify alternative outcomes of events. We argue that a valuation approach offers an iterative understanding of event outcomes which encourages economics and constructivist research to collaborate on exploring event worth and making event overflows knowable and valuable.

## Introduction

The story goes that while concocting his ambitious plans for sociology, newly appointed professor in Sociology at Harvard University Talcott Parsons made an accord with his powerful colleagues at the Economics Department in the 1930s. As he ventured into developing economic sociology and to ensure its prosperous development without stepping into the turf of powerful colleagues, Parsons proposed a division between the two research fields in which the economists would continue to study value while he and his peers would tend to the studying of values. This agreement later became known as *Parsons' Pact*. In the postwar years, the delimitation of the field of study – the social, *not* the economy – helped establish sociology as a clear-cut and respectable field of study.

The past few decades have seen a raising interest in revisiting these said borders and the proposed ontological and epistemological divide set up between the study of economics and the social. In the article *For a Sociology of Worth*, Stark (2000) proposes that the analysis of markets and of economic relations should not be left to economists while sociologists focus their efforts on the social relations in which they are embedded. As opposed to seeing markets as embedded in social relations, a Sociology of worth – or what has later become known as Valuation Studies - sees markets *as* social relations. Such an approach goes from studying the static fixtures of value and values to understand valuation as a social practice. To explore valuation as social practice entails seeing that “valuation has many objects as well as many subjects, and is a process that takes many forms. Sometimes it is about assessing value, sometimes about producing it, and sometimes about both at the same time.” (Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013:4).

Turning our eyes onto tourism academia of today, the division proposed in Parsons' pact is reflected in how tourism research is overwhelmingly drawn into either a managerial or critical direction. While this divide has been described at length elsewhere (Tribe, 1997), we are concerned here not with their differences, but with how they are joined in abiding to and upholding the Parsonian distinction. While the former (in an arguably simplified description) seeks to pin down and measure value, the latter seeks to describe, discuss and often lament the lack of or dislocation of values. In a special issue entitled *Valuing Tourism* of the Valuation Studies journal, Ren, Petersen, and Dredge (2015) argue that while managerial and critical approaches to tourism differ in terms of

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the valuing devices employed, and subsequently in how tourism as a phenomenon is studied and assessed, the two approaches share an understanding of the values of tourism as relatively stable entities ‘out there’. Thus, in spite of how the two dominant strands in tourism research often define themselves in opposition to one another, both approaches continuously co-construct a bifurcated epistemology of tourism values according to which tourism economists study value and tourism sociologists (or critical tourism scholars) study values.

Tourism studies is also witnessing attempts to challenge the divides between value and values and to explore instead the social practices of valuation and the registers through which different types of worth are enabled and made visible. In such work, the values of tourism are not understood as determining valuation but are rather seen as the effects of specific and situated valuing practices and devices. Such an approach does not explore value as a pre-existing entity waiting to be measured and assessed, but rather as emerging through various mechanisms and everyday practices of actors involved in the different stages of planning, implementing, taking part in and assessing tourism.

Ren et al. (2015) argue how “much work in the area of valuation studies is marked by cultivating a more agnostic and performative approach (Callon, 1986) to questions of valuing and values” (2015:88). An example of such work is *Socio-technological authentication* by Lugosi (2016) in which he describes the processes of authentication as value claims are enacted by a network of actors. The article explores the performative techniques through which notions of authenticity may be inscribed. As he shows, the value of objects are transformed, calculated and negotiated through different networks of interactions, where clear-cut distinctions cannot be made between ‘the economic’ and ‘the cultural’, between ‘the technical’ and ‘the social’, and between ‘hard numbers’ and ‘soft values’.

In this article, we wish to further such Valuation Studies approaches (Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013, Kjellberg et al., 2013) in tourism by exploring valuation as a social practice. We rehearse its potentialities within the empirical field of events using valuation as the theoretical toolkit to make sense of event outcomes as taxing accomplishments performed through and by a range of actors, discourses, tools, technologies. Methodologically, we draw on qualitative and quantitative methods which are able to engage with many different ‘registers of worth’ keeping in mind that researching and measuring value are not innocent or objective endeavors.

Seeing our methods as performative (Law, 2004b), the aim of our study was not to *pin down value* by assessing the event through a range of tools (‘to measure’). Nor was it only to *display values* using descriptive devices (‘to critique’). As we sought to weave together and experiment with different ways to research and account for what the event what worth in different settings, we attempted to matter through interference (Law, 2004a), seeing our own research methods as valuation devices, as part of enacting event worth and ultimately (although in modest ways) of enacting the social (Law & Urry, 2004). Thus, research interests and societal interests merged in this project in trying not to ‘capture’, but rather to collaboratively instigate event outcomes together with event actors. In exploring how event outcomes are created and valued, we draw on material gathered around a large Arctic sports and cultural event, the Arctic Winter Games (AWG), organized in Nuuk, Greenland in 2016.

Our attempt to explore valuation through the AWG 2016 event is closely connected to discussions of how events and tourism at a large are increasingly valued through their connection to actors and practices which we have previously not thought of as part of ‘tourism proper’ (see also Jóhannesson, Ren, & van der Duim, 2015). As argued by Ren et al. (2015), “As we become increasingly aware that tourism is more complex and entangled than previously assumed, we need to address how its effects are more intensively distributed in, for instance, regional development, city planning, education, innovation and cultural imaginaries, or—as we tend to in the present—in everyday practices” (p. 89). Following this thought, our current endeavor is an attempt to map out, better grasp and interfere with how events are valued as they interweave with other societal actors, activities and interests and entangle into other spheres and activity zones of society and business life (Petersen & Ren, 2015).

The article proceeds in the following way. We first present the theoretical underpinnings of the article, drawing on Valuation Studies. We introduce the concepts of framing and overflowing (Callon, 1998) as analytical tools to engage with the identification and management of externalities arising from the AWG events. We advocate approaches which use both qualitative and quantitative tools, seeing these as valuation devices in themselves, to engage with the ongoing emergence of event value. In the methodology section, we explain why a valuation approach was particularly relevant for the case of the *Arctic Winter Games, 2016* and its Greenlandic hosts and how we attempted to operationalize such an approach. We introduce the research set-up and how social valuation was researched empirically, explaining how it offers an alternative to traditional ways of assessing event value.

In the analysis section, we exemplify this through an ‘account’ (in both meanings of the word) of social valuation. Seeing our approach as a valuation device, an experiment of how event values could become reframed, we show how its iterative work between quantification and qualification enabled to identify, frame and measure externalities. As a consequence, the valuation study was able to contain unexpected ‘event overflows’. We conclude by proposing how research might engage more profoundly with valuation in events - and tourism at a large - in ways, which might reshuffle connections between economics and sociology and expand the academic as well as public understand of the overflows of events and its different registers of worth.

### Event valuation as social practice

The recent attempts of joining disparate activities under the field of Valuation Studies draw heavily on Dewey and his theory of valuation (1939). Seeking to avoid the pitfalls of an economic or sociological reading of values, Dewey’s so-called flank movement (Kornberger et al., 2015) suggests seeing valuation as a social practice and “as the outcome of a process of social work and the result of a wide range of activities (from production and combination to circulation and assessment) that aim at making things valuable” (Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013:6). Thus, Valuation Studies does “not just study evaluation, the activity of classifying things as either valuable or not, but also valorising, the activity of making things (more) valuable” (Heuts & Mol, 2013):129. In a joint reflection on

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