

## **Tourism knowledge**

### **A robust, adaptable system (reply to Isaac and Platenkamp)**

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The publication of a journal article creates a number of intriguing challenges and hostages to fortune. First whilst knowledge is always provisional, the knowledge contained in a journal article becomes reified yet also static and ossified, imprisoned in its original published form. Further the complexity of knowledge is invariably compromised and simplified by the need to conform to a journal's word limits. Third the meanings and messages assigned and intended by authors in their published text are not immutable. Rather they are subject to various interpretations and misinterpretations by their readers. In light of the above we are grateful to Isaac and Platenkamp for their commentary which offers us an opportunity to engage in a more dynamic process of knowledge creation around these issues; explain ourselves beyond our original word limits; address any contested interpretations as well as to embrace and critique their own contribution.

Our reply to Isaac and Platenkamp is divided into a number of issues starting with some general observations. The first of these relates to scope and focus. Isaac and Platenkamp got diverted in their commentary on Tribe and Liburd (2016) choosing to extend their remit to critiquing arguments contained in Munar and Jamal (2016). We refrain from replying to these issues as we do not think it legitimate for us to attempt to answer these further questions on behalf of these esteemed colleagues. Second we raise the issue of clarity. Despite many careful readings we are not always able to follow the logic of Isaac and Platenkamp. We could not always grasp their bigger meaning amongst the detail of evidence in their prose.

Nevertheless the substantive commentary of Isaac and Platenkamp is centred on the section in Tribe and Liburd (2016) on Value based knowledge. Since our article covered the full gamut of knowledge production it was only able to give this aspect limited attention. So Isaac and Platenkamp offer a very useful unpacking of some of the wider and deeper issues surrounding values in knowledge production. This includes making distinctions between *werturteil* (value judgement) and *wertbeziehung* (value commitment) and the contribution of critical theory. They also refer to the *Positivismusstreit* (positivism dispute) where the differences between natural and social sciences were debated including discussions about the status of values in the social sciences. To shed further light on this area we would recommend De Angelis (2015) as a lucid and contemporary discussion shedding light on the issues raised by this part of the *Tourism Knowledge System*.

However we also note with some dismay that Isaac and Platenkamp sometimes run rather fast and loose with the content of our article ascribing meaning that may help with their rhetoric but which is not warranted by the text under scrutiny. The first of these was a reference to our "monistic intention". It is somewhat presumptuous for others to ascribe one's intent. In the case of Isaac and Platenkamp it is also erroneous. A typical definition of monism is "the reduction of all processes, structures, concepts, etc., to a single governing principle; the theoretical explanation of everything in terms of one principle" (Dictionary.com, 2016). Our approach to tourism knowledge could not be more opposed to this. Anyone with a knowledge of Tribe's (from 1997 onwards) work will know that he has consistently sought to liberate the understanding and study of tourism from its early (perhaps monistic) business approaches.

Isaac and Platenkamp pursue this argument remarking that that “plural awareness should reign, instead of the monistic intention ... that characterizes these systems ” Here we have to ask whether Isaac and Platenkamp read to the end of *The Tourism Knowledge System*? In fact the major point of the article is to understand the rich plurality of approaches to tourism knowledge creation, initially advanced by Liburd (2012). Moreover it specifically concludes by asking “what is lost if tourism studies operates as a restricted field without sufficient nourishment from arts and humanities, science, web 2.0, Value-based Knowledge and indigenous knowledge.” It continues “A fundamental challenge emerges from this. How can tourism knowledge become more epistemologically pluralist...” (pp 58-59).

Next, despite the fact that we devote the whole section (discussed above) to the importance of values in tourism research Isaac and Platenkamp assert that “it is thus a relativist, value-free orientation to research that Tribe and Liburd end up advocating for by default.” They are being mischievous here. First we take care not to advocate for any particular orientation to research. Rather we clearly set out a number of competing ways of knowing about tourism. It is not the case that any of these are necessarily better than others. It is more a case of understanding the breadth of choice available and that some are more suitable for particular purposes than others. Second we most certainly do not advocate a value-free orientation to research. We clearly aligned ourselves with Feyerabend’s (1975) statement that that we should not allow disciplinary knowledge that has an objectivity obsession to rule unchallenged.

Further Isaac and Platenkamp state that “our argument is against the erasure of *werturteile*, lost as dissent is polished out in service of conceptualizing a ‘system’ “. We have not sought to erase *werturteil* (value judgement) from *The Tourism Knowledge System*. Nor have we polished out dissent in our conceptualisation of *The Tourism Knowledge System*. It should be abundantly clear that our system encourages dissent. For example we note that “value-based positional research such as feminist ... or postcolonial research can offer an important counter force to that which conforms to the dominant ideology”. Similarly we endorsed Veijola et al’s (2014) mission to break the rules of conventional knowledge and disrupt the habitual in tourism and its scholarship.

Finally Isaac and Platenkamp state that “Tribe and Liburd divert from the critical tradition in a fundamental way”. We find this hard to understand. Critical theory is essentially about understanding power, hidden values, ideology and emancipation. These are key issues in the sociology of knowledge. *The Tourism Knowledge System* locates itself squarely within this tradition. It relentlessly unearths the operation of power in knowledge creation through its deployment of the knowledge force field where it identifies the operation of ideology, positionality, global capital and governments.

When developing *The Tourism Knowledge System* we were aware that structures and systems are out of fashion in research. We were of course conscious of contemporary critiques such as post-modernism, liquid modernity and mobilities and a tendency to offer “messiness” rather than structure. We recognise the inherent messiness of knowledge creation. However structures and systems have their benefits. They give us an overview. They enable us to see broad relationships. They help us to simplify the complexities of knowledge. They help to foreground the operation of hidden interests. We believe *The Tourism Knowledge System* offers a robust model for understanding the different ways in which the tourism world can be studied and understood. But as our opening remark suggested, knowledge is always provisional. In this spirit we would encourage researchers to engage with it. To treat it as a dynamic system, to question it, to adapt it, to

reconfigure it, to make it messier so that it does not remain static and ossified, imprisoned in its original published form. Indeed this raises wider questions about the evolution of knowledge. Perhaps it reinforces Liburd's (2012) argument for Tourism Knowledge 2.0 with a WIKI approach to allowing additions and amendments to articles by any interested party so that knowledge is always in a state of becoming...

... or maybe not as whilst we would welcome some filling in by Isaac and Platenkamp of the finer detail of value based tourism research, we would not agree with many of their readings, conclusions, lines of argument or style of writing.

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