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ACADEMIC ACTIVISM IN TOURISM STUDIES:

CRITICAL NARRATIVES FROM FOUR RESEARCHERS

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ABSTRACT

A climate of neoliberalism challenges the work of scholars whose research focuses on societal well-being through embedded community research and critical analysis of public policy, planning, and industry practices, what we call academic activism. This paper draws on the autoethnographic insights and critical narratives of four tourism scholars to describe and analyse in a systematic manner the experiences of these researchers each engaged in what they consider to be academic activism. Our aim is to bring into focus and raise as matters of concern the future of tourism research in the neoliberal university and the need for greater critical and reflexive engagement by researchers in their positionality and agency. While the contexts in which we work and our experiences differ greatly, the paper identifies common themes, challenges and opportunities within our approaches to research and action. Four emergent themes arose through the narrative analysis that helped to structure insights and findings: experiential journeys that shaped our current academic positionality and philosophical approaches to research and practice; a preference for embedded situated methodologies; a reflexive understanding of our political positioning; and a critical situated approach to understanding the external influences upon our research and strivings to contribute to the public good. The paper raises challenging questions on the meaning of tourism research and the “public good” in the neoliberal university, and what being an academic activist entails in this context.

Keywords: Academic Activism, Tourism Studies, Neoliberalism, Narrative Analysis, Public Good.

Introduction

Across the world, universities have never been under more pressure to deliver on a range of research, teaching and societal goals (Pusser, Kempner, Marginson, & Ordorika, 2012; Suspitsyna, 2011). Contextual drivers and influences might vary, but it is fair to say that university managers are subject to increasingly tight fiscal conditions and highly demanding higher education policy prescriptions and incentives (Saarinen & Ursin, 2012). Research (and impending teaching) excellence frameworks in some jurisdictions, based on blunt and often inappropriate metrics, have increased the pressure on researchers to “publish or perish” (Macdonald & Kam, 2009). They have prompted universities to pursue commercialisation strategies in an effort to offset the declining share of public funds needed for continued expansion. Mass teaching delivery has permitted increased economies of scale. The standardisation of curriculum has meant contextualised and local course content is disappearing in favour of internationalised and generic common courses that cut across traditional disciplinary divides and that can be delivered to large cohorts more cost-effectively. Impediments to student and staff mobility have disappeared, and tenure and job security for academic workers have been eroded (Altbach, 2015). Publication of research has become a game, and well-resourced universities have invested heavily in both creating and perpetuating a system in which the chosen metrics ensure they are the winners (Neylon, 2014). In the process, industrial production of research has consolidated (Raunig & Negri, 2013). These recent developments in higher education across the world have come to be associated with “the neoliberal university”, and provide important context for understanding the social and institutional regulation of research affecting researchers interested in activism and driving change (Giroux, 2014).

The aim of this paper is to identify the challenges and opportunities for activist tourism research by presenting a narrative analysis of the perspectives of the four listed authors. In addressing this aim, we first discuss the neoliberal university as the setting in which the challenges and opportunities for academic activism are encountered. Next, the method of analysis is outlined which explains the reflexive process through which we explored, shared, reflected and analysed our positionality and experiences. Four emergent themes were identified that structure the findings: experiential journeys that shaped current academic positionality; a preference for embedded situated methodologies; a reflexive understanding of our political positioning; and a critical, situated approach to understanding the external influences upon our research and strivings to contribute to the public good. We then return to

address the opportunities and challenges for academic activism, discussing it within the context of our findings and within the wider context of research in the neoliberal university.

Before discussing the meaning of academic activism and the neoliberal university we offer our definition of academic activism. Academic activism has become an increasing topic of concern for academics (Castree, 2000; Piven, 2010, The Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010). Blomley (2008) proposes four ways that academic activism may be undertaken and each of the authors has variously engaged in these activities. The first is through rhetoric or scholarly voice; academics can be activists through the production of knowledge that challenges the subjectivities underpinning research or by questioning dominant discourses. This can occur in classrooms, at conferences, writing journal articles, or more recently, the uptake of academic blogs. Second, academic activism occurs through collective work in the academy where a collective informed position can be used to facilitate change. Third, academic activism occurs through becoming a scholar with a voice in the public sphere - an individual who actively proposes, facilitates or empowers change or resistance. Lastly, academics can belong to activist groups, lobby groups, professional associations and other organisations that seek change or work with the state to change policy or legislation. An academic activist can be one or more of these types at any one time and they may change roles over time as well.

Academic Activism and the Neoliberal University

Flew (2014) has argued that the term “neoliberalism” has become generalised and ambiguous at the expense of rigorous analysis of what the term actually means. In the context of higher education policy, the implementation of neoliberal market management has, for instance, introduced and accentuated competition between universities (regardless of the different historical roles and locational characteristics), it has converted students into customers, and knowledge into measurable research outputs. Neoliberal university management has also placed pressure on academic labour to produce “products” such as graduates and research outputs more cheaply and efficiently, creating pressure on the intellectual, physical and emotional resources and time of individual faculty members (Välilmaa & Hoffman, 2008).

With these changes taking place in higher education, it is perhaps not surprising that questions have been raised about the role of the university and its relationship to big societal issues. Climate change, rural poverty and social inequalities, transnational migrations and refugee crises, political, religious and ethnic conflict, are among the severe societal

challenges we face in the 21st century. However, critics argue that the adoption of the neoliberal university, shaped by higher education policy that positions universities as vehicles for economic development and innovation, its gamification of metrics and rankings, and its focus on commercialisation and partnering, has created a complex social-political environment. This environment and associated power relations operate at individual, institutional and global levels to regulate the parameters of what might be considered valuable research, to set expectations about what contributions to knowledge are, and to narrowly define research excellence (Rowlands, 2013). In the process, certain types of research are more highly valued; researchers may act to maximise their own advantage; and position themselves according to their understanding of the opportunities, their capabilities, and the availability of institutional and other types of support (*ibid*).

Comporting with the above, we use the term neoliberalism in three ways in this paper (see Flew, 2014). First, we refer to the “neoliberal paradigm” to mean an ideological discourse supporting the operation of free markets and limited government intervention, the characteristics and impacts of which are poorly understood but often accepted unquestioningly (Harvey, 2005). Second, we adopt the term “neoliberal capitalism” to describe western market capitalism, most notably the Anglo-American model which promotes globalisation, profit maximisation, mobility of capital, resources, expertise and so on, and in the process, often minimises the value of local communities and environments (Hill & Kumar, 2012). Lastly, we use “neoliberal governmentality” to refer to the processes of social and institutional regulation at play in universities that produce researchers who reify neoliberal values through their choices, behaviours and actions. The knowledge production process acts to auto-regulate the system (Kaščák & Pupala, 2011).

The neoliberal context described above provides a background for our exploration of academic activism in tourism studies. To date, there has been little attempt to understand how (and why) tourism related academics embed themselves in community activism (Dredge, Hales & Jamal, 2013) and what are the opportunities and challenges of adopting such a position. In the context of the neoliberal university, this paper examines the experiences and perceptions of four tourism scholars who self-identify as being engaged in various forms of activism in research and teaching (e.g., through service learning projects in class). Borrowing from Latour (2004) our exploration of the challenges and opportunities of activism in tourism research are not motivated by a desire to present matters of fact, or to reach a unified (factual) stance on academic activism in tourism. Rather it is to identify matters of concern, to raise

issues and bring into the open, the opportunities and challenges of activism within the current higher education setting that we argue is being dominated by the neoliberal university.

Research Approach and Methods

Inspired by autoethnographic approaches (e.g. Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011), this paper seeks to describe and analyse in a systematic manner, the experiences of four tourism researchers each engaged in what they consider to be academic activism. While the contexts in which they work and their experiences differ greatly, the paper identifies common themes, challenges and opportunities within their approaches to research and action. Taking a collective discursive approach, the authors' perceptions were brought into conversation with each other, with the literature, and within the increasingly industrial complex of academic life.

The research method used was twofold: autoethnographic reflections and narrative analysis. Previous research examining researcher positionality and academic activism have used autoethnography (Shragge, 2013) and collective reflexive approaches (The Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010). In the present study, the research also used narrative analysis to examine the personal and professional narratives gathered from each of the four authors. This approach uses thematic analysis procedures to examine the reflexive voices and experiences of the authors (Polkinghorne, 1995). The significance of this form of narrative analysis in this study lies in the co-construction of meaning from the process of reflection with other researchers. In this paper, meaning was constructed in various ways, but the most evident process was the development of the individual researcher's story and discussions with co-authors. This is important, as narrative analysis is not an account of a pre-existing reality but a meaning-making exercise (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). The research approach proceeded as follows: First, four researchers agreed to conduct a reflexive analysis of their academic work that could be considered activism. Two questions were posed to guide their reflections:

What is the purpose of your work in tourism-related studies and what aspects do you consider to have an activist element?

*How did you philosophically arrive at your position in the activist research you conduct?
 (“philosophical” used broadly here to refer to the personal and professional values and preferences that guided activist positionality)*

Based on these two questions the researchers wrote their narrative responses. Responses ranged from 2,000 to 3,000 words per researcher. After each researcher had completed their written responses, they each read the others’ responses and individually analysed them in order to determine the features that were common to all responses. In the paradigmatic method of analysis, the narratives of respondents are used to thematically derive important and common features of the stories of people who are interviewed (Polkinghorne, 1995). Each author examined all narratives and reflected on the challenges and opportunities for activist tourism research and inductively determined important themes through conceptual coding. A Skype meeting was then conducted during which each researcher shared their analysis of the narratives. Through a process of consensus-building, four interlinked themes were identified. These themes were experiential journeys towards current positionality; an embedded, situated methodology; negotiating objectivity and political-reflexivity; and research and the public good.

Exemplar responses from each of the researchers were identified to demonstrate these themes, and extensive email exchanges accumulated over a year in a collective sense-making exercise. Biographical information of each academic, more details of the activist activities and the transcripts of the original texts can be found in the researcher’s collective blog (Academic Activist Blog, 2016). Space limitations preclude their inclusion in this paper. Limitations of narrative research are commonly cited from a realist epistemological perspective (Polkinghorne, 2007). For example, it is claimed that narrative analysis has inherent problems of replication and reliability because the purpose of such a perspective is to generalise results (Polkinghorne, 2007). However, with narrative analysis (as with other interpretive analysis) the credibility of the research is based on the reader’s confidence in the plausibility, credibility and, ultimately, the trustworthy nature of the analysis and their claims (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2013; Geiger & Schreyögg, 2012;). Thus, the representative text used to demonstrate the findings is also the window through which the reader sees the research and related theoretical insights. The array of publications that each of the co-authors has produced separately, and together as co-authors, also adds an additional layer of ‘trustworthiness’ from a research method perspective, since many of these

publications explore the particular cases and episodes of activism that they are reflecting upon.

The local university context of each author has influenced how they conduct their research, teaching and service. Freya works in South Australia and Rob works in Queensland, Australia. Dianne works in Denmark whereas Tazim works in Texas, USA. Despite the different locations of the researchers, the thematic analysis revealed commonalities across geographical divides in the day to day experiences of the neoliberal university. More details of the context of each author can be found in the Academic Activist Blog (2016).

We present the narrative analysis in the following sections according to the four reflexive themes that emerged. Space limitations dictate that only the narrative exemplars of two authors are offered in each theme. Auto-ethnography and research narrative analysis can be accused of self-indulgent narcissism (as occurred during the blind review of the manuscript). We attempted to exercise rigorous self-reflexivity in order to avoid falling into this trap and in order to offer a critical analysis of our experiences

Experiential journeys towards current positionality

The first of the themes we present is the importance of our personal historical experience in our academic journeys. For each of the researchers, influences prior to joining academia played a significant role in shaping their interests, directions, approaches and well-being in the academic environment. For Dianne, the tension between her professional work and her personal values was important in her positionality as a researcher:

The mismatch between my vision for just and sustainable planning and the realities of working within a pro-commercial development sector was a constant challenge during my employment as a planner and had a powerful influence on my later positioning as a critical researcher.

Similarly, for Freya, there was an experiential dimension from previous contexts that led to her present positionality as an activist researcher. Freya's principled stance on the "local community's right to survive and secure sustainable livelihoods" emanates from an emotional and personal position seeded in childhood as she experienced her community being "irrevocably changed through elite, second-home tourism".

Tazim's critical 'turn' was closely related to growing up as a postcolonial 'subject' in East Africa, but crystallised after assuming a tenure-track position in Texas. She added this to the sustainability approach that she had learned during graduate school in Canada.

Through small forays into the humanities to gather theoretical insights, it slowly dawned on me that I was a diasporic, postcolonial subject, a third generation, syncretic Indian-Muslim, deeply interested in issues of environmental and social justice. Could I engage in *praxis* through community-based research and pedagogy? The meaning of sustainable tourism and responsible tourism got increasingly complicated...

A common thread in the diverse perspectives of the four researchers is, therefore, how their situated experience of alterity shape their approach as researchers and activists. In addition, shifting theoretical influences also play a role in situating the researchers. Tazim's directions have been influenced by, but not limited to an increasing turn towards the humanities to seek ethical and methodological insights. These have influenced her to further explore phenomenology, hermeneutics, and the role of virtue ethics and practical wisdom (*phronēsis*). Dianne has also engaged in her own journey with reflective practice (see below) as she has worked to shape tourism planning to serve diverse tourism stakeholders and interests.

The values that underpin the actions of all four authors direct them towards achieving outcomes for others in the community who are silenced or less able to participate in political debate. This observation suggests that it is important not only to be conscious of historical and political contexts confronting communities in which we undertake our research but also how our own histories and perspectives as researchers intersecting with those of the researched (Preston & Aslett, 2014). Scholars who choose this approach to identify opportunities to make change happen, seek to awaken students, research subjects and educators to their agency, and they commit to keeping alive alternative discourses that challenge the neoliberal governmentality in higher education and research (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006).

Embedded situated methodologies

In the narratives of each researcher, a pillar of their activist academic endeavours is a research methodology that can best be described as an embedded situated methodology (Dredge et al., 2013). The notion of embeddedness is a twofold phenomenon. The researchers

are, for better or worse, embedded in the institutional structure of the university and must work within its rules, routines and practices. However, universities' authority to direct researchers towards certain research questions and outcomes has been demonstrated over centuries to be a vexed one, where academic freedom has historically been defended (Marginson, 2007; Kodelja, 2013). In addition, some have argued that researchers should also be embedded in societal concerns and to be of service to others, given that universities are, for the most part, publicly funded institutions (Nussbaum, 2012). The authors of this paper typically emphasise tourism research in the context of societal concerns because they are Other-oriented. However, university interests may inhibit this work. For example, higher education and economic policy are closely intertwined and activist research that creates tensions in the smooth operation of economic development is often discouraged (Flood Martin, & Dreher, 2013).

Dianne has developed a research programme where her planning skills and academic positioning can be used to pursue collaborative, action research with communities. For her, the theoretical perspectives drawn from academic engagement link with practical knowledge gained from working with various communities.

With my simultaneous positioning as both a tourism consultant and researcher, I was optimistic that I would be able to engage in a type of collaborative action research with different communities of interest; my research agenda could be generated from dialogue between research and practice; and my research could remain non-aligned with the hegemonic forces of economic growth and global globalisation that have served as the *raison d'être* for government involvement in tourism.

Dianne is influenced by the arguments of Schon (1983) that by taking a reflection-in-action stance, practitioners use theory and method to explain social (tourism) problems. This process of sense-making and the pragmatism-inspired restructuring of theoretical explanations lends itself to, firstly, potential intervention by the researcher, and secondly, it may "help other practitioners to enter into a way of seeing, restructuring and intervening which they may wish to make their own" (1983, p.318). Forester's *The Deliberative Practitioner* (Forester, 2000) and later, Flyvbjerg's interpretation of the Greek concept of *phronesis* (Flyvbjerg, 2004) extends Schon's practitioner reflection, interpreting the role of the researcher as an active agent who influences both directly and indirectly the definition and understanding of the

problem and the identification of potential solutions through their own “value-full” engagement. In this way, the power and rationality of the activist researcher can have a powerful influence on the production of tourism knowledge, as all four of us have experienced.

Freya’s background has also resulted in a research approach that is grounded in the community-tourism interface and seeks to use the service charter of her university to develop projects with tourism NGOs and Indigenous communities. In particular, Freya is sympathetic to Giroux’s recounting of the example set by Edward Said as a public intellectual and activist (2006). Here Giroux explains Said’s commitment to worldliness, wakefulness and border crossings:

Being awake meant accepting the demands of worldliness, which implied giving voice to complex and controversial ideas in the public sphere, recognising human injury beyond the privileged space of the academy, and using theory as a form of criticism to redress injustice (Giroux, 2006, p. 304).

Freya considers that her activism is a process of giving voice from “the community’s interface with tourism and it is from thence that she works to challenge the discipline and the phenomenon, to ‘humanise’ it as some community activists say”.

All four authors are strongly concerned that their service is directed to other communities of interest beyond industry, communities that are typically confronting the ecological, sociological and/or cultural impacts resulting from the consequences of tourism development but whose voices are marginalised or overlooked in development discourses. Far from being anti-tourism, the authors are unanimous in their support for the positive world-making benefits of tourism. Moreover, their views are consistent with Bexley et al.’s (2011) findings that this type of service to the community is poorly rewarded in university tenure and promotion systems and should receive greater recognition (Bexley, James & Arkoudis, 2011).

The narratives reveal that each author has experienced tensions in meeting the performance measures and approval of university managers as they have tried to be of service outside the academy (for the public good). An important source of this tension is embeddedness, as researchers must negotiate the rival demands of the academy and the communities that they become deeply entwined with. The complex negotiations of entry into communities, being of service to their needs and, eventually, the exit process is a great deal more time consuming

than other forms of research. As the Indigenous context demonstrates, relationships are key and long-term commitments and solidarity is demanded as the pendulum swings towards Indigenous rights (Smith, 1999). In this context, academic activism must be *with* communities and not *for* them in order to foster mutual empowerment, self-determination and emancipation.

Negotiating objectivity and political reflexivity

The vexed notion of objectivity was a key theme that emerged from the analysis of the narratives. Accusations that activist research is subjective, politically motivated, biased or even in violation of some code of academic conduct (often inspired by the narrow vision of scientific rationality) have been experienced by each of the researchers within their institutions, in manuscript review processes, and in conference interactions. All the authors agreed these criticisms lack reflexive self-awareness, since all research, even positivist research, is underpinned by researcher values and subjectivities (c.f. Foucault, 1980; Lyotard, 1979). Such criticisms have prompted each author to examine and develop a detailed position on concepts such as objectivity, subjective rationality and reflexivity.

Rob's response to the issue of objectivity is firstly through a negotiation of an ethics of proximity and a reliance on codes such as human rights. This reflects universal ethics and impels action for and with other people. This is reflected in his alignment with Kant's categorical imperatives to make sense of fluid notions of justice, which then has implications for the responsibility of the state when rights are deemed to have been breached. Rob concludes in his narrative:

Importantly for academic activism, the move from theoretical posturing over what ought to happen, to the enactment of moral action in this way means that the action is not simply a subjective act to help/save the individual or thing (environment), but is guided by foundational grounding of rights and the valuing of the Other.

This is not to say that one's proximity to others is a more important source of action for others (cf. Hales & Caton, 2015), but that notions of universal rights intrude on personal and relational action. For Tazim, this involves a constant struggle to mediate the tension between rights accorded to the *generalised* 'other' versus the needs and injustices experienced by the *particular* 'other' (as expressed by various feminist theorists). For her, virtue ethics and an

ethic of care are important in striving for equitable, fair and just outcomes in the tourism domain (Jamal and Camargo, 2014)., and in translating knowledge into action through the use of service learning projects in teaching.

Similarly, Freya questions the concept of objectivity by posing the question: objectivity for who? Insider research, which problematises the representation of the Other, is important to ensure dominant representations are not encoded as truths (Smith, 1999). Prioritising the voices of the communities impacted by tourism, her work becomes community-centric as opposed to what she calls tourism-centric:

This requires greater exposition than I can give here, but basically, in my opinion, community rights and needs should override all others because it is they that must live with the impacts of tourism on their community. Tourists have a home to go to and their right to tour is a frivolous luxury in comparison to the local community's right to survive and secure sustainable livelihoods.

The above accounts suggest that negotiating objectivity appear to be a dual challenge of searching for a moral position whilst at the same time adopting a mode or process in which to enact these morals (Bourdieu, 2003). The authors of this paper note that there is often an expectation of “pure objectivity” by others (i.e. governments, university managers, colleagues, community). In Bourdieu's view, scholars should not be drawn into the erroneous argument that scholars should be distant observers of the world to achieve objectivity. Justification of a researcher's position must rely on a political reflexivity which has an outward focus, and which Bourdieu claims is different to the narcissistic reflexivity of some research that focuses only on the private world of the researcher (Bourdieu, 2003). Being politically reflexive means that the interpretations of researchers need to be critically situated and politically transparent in light of the potential perpetuation of dominant cultural, social and political discourses, through unquestioning politically blind interpretations (Haynes, 2012).

Academic activists are not merely articulating Others' thoughts, but more significantly supporting, synthesising, articulating and embodying that representation in various dissemination efforts (often beyond metric-driven journal publications). Thus, these authors support arguments that academic activists should not shy away from debates about objectivity, but challenge the very notion of objectivity on every occasion (Maxey, 1999).

Research, the public good and neoliberalism

All four authors identified a strong moral commitment, generally developed as a result of prior personal or professional experience, which has been important in their positioning. This moral positioning for just, sustainable and equitable tourism was also underpinned by a strong personal commitment to deliberative forms of democratic and inclusive engagement with communities, many of which were perceived by the researchers to have been marginalised or disempowered under an increasingly neoliberal capitalism and neoliberal governmentality (see Hales 2006; Dredge, 2010; Higgins-Desbiolles. 2012; Jamal & Camargo, 2014). Rob's reflections on how neoliberal governmentality has affected social and environmental decision-making have directed his research interests:

I have increasingly questioned what constitutes the public interest in social and environmental issues, thus, the purpose of my work in tourism studies is to critique the process of development that does not take into account social and environmental consequences for local communities.

Tazim draws from her ongoing theoretical explorations to better understand how the life world of human beings intersects with tourism and the biophysical world. She remains thoughtful to this while she engages in community service learning projects in teaching:

Learning of some critical, poststructural, postmodern and philosophical perspectives has “coloured” and radically altered my perspectives and influenced me to strive towards praxis in tourism practice... It alerts us to the challenges that arise when scientific rationalisation (with a toolkit to measure, monitor and predict) and economic rationalisation (aiming to commodify, control, and “make more productive and efficient”) intersects the life-world of human beings, human-environmental relationships and the biophysical world.

Scholars who confront the intersection between the life-world and scientific and economic rationalism though researching the public good have a value-full approach to their research. All authors of this paper have a commitment to deliberative democracy and inclusive engagement practices which are important to counter powerful interests inside and outside institutions. These interests tend to control the scope and intent of academic output in a way that delegitimises or disempowers activist research (e.g. by increasing pressure to secure

large grants that may involve catering to corporate funding interests for economic, industry-relevant research rather than social justice and social good) (Harland et al, 2010).

A common thread amongst all narratives has been the desire to reclaim the notion of public good. Each author has variously problematised the nature of tourism research for the public good, calling for new conceptualisations that incorporate a broader set of values beyond neoliberal economic growth. Not surprisingly, each of the authors has, from time to time, felt that powerful interests inside and outside their institutions have questioned their activist research. Whilst not specifically identified in any of the narratives, it was through the process of writing this paper that the role of peer groups and collegial networks in supporting these alternative values, voices and research approaches became evident, and was seen as vital support in the face of neoliberal governmentality.

Making our way forward: Strategies of academic and pedagogic resistance

An important purpose of this paper is to bring attention to the challenges for academic activism within the wider context of tourism research in the neoliberal university and share some of our journeys in the hope of encouraging others to continue much-needed societally oriented research and critical pedagogy. Scholars actively engaged in environmental, societal and community-based research are being subject to a range of pressures under the banner of neoliberal university management (i.e. a higher education derivative of new public management, as Shore & Davidson (2014) observe. They may be sidelined through administrative and promotion related pressures to engage in industry-relevant grant bid processes, marginalised through the academic promotion schemes of universities, or face difficulties in facilitating critical thinking due to the overemphasis of vocational-industry teaching content driven by the student fee paying system (Ayikoru, 2014). While some react to the erosion of academic freedom by expressing their concerns directly in public spaces (Harland, Tidswell, Everett, Hale, & Pickering, 2010), others and adopt a critical activist pedagogy or similar (Preston & Aslett, 2014; Nelson, 2010). Yet others have explicitly built greater links between their research and service-oriented community groups (Baguley & Fullarton, 2013). To date, there has been little attempt to understand the process of how tourism and hospitality scholars engage within the increasingly neoliberal context of tourism studies (see Airy, Tribe, Beckendorff & Xiao, 2015, Dredge & Schott 2013; Ayikoru, 2014). This paper represents our call for much-needed joint conversations and collaborative actions to protect academic freedom and encourage greater community engagement We share our

professional experiences and personal values that underpin our academic activism in solidarity with tourism-related scholars in the developing and developed countries who are undertaking similar journeys and hope that this paper encourages both current and new generations of upcoming tourism scholars to engage with critical economic, environmental and social issues in the context of tourism studies.

As the previous sections illustrated, notions of “activism” are highly contextual, they are infused with personal and professional values that are further shaped and constrained by the dominant institutional and historical structures we are embedded in and the agency that we can exercise within them. Each one of us has our own particular conception of the public good, but we are all committed to assisting disadvantaged groups and communities that might otherwise not have access to the technical skills, expertise, or voice needed to address issues of social justice, public policy and the erosion of public spaces and common pool resources (environmental and social-cultural) in the face of globalized neoliberalism. As we experience the erosion of the public sphere in our respective parts of the world, it is imperative to join in resistance and action to protect academic freedom and be able to engage in critical research and pedagogy (for those of us in public universities, our work and efforts must surely be oriented towards the public good). But this raises some challenging issues for future consideration, especially in light of the increasing emphasis on measuring research impact (Airey, Tribe, Beckendorff, Xiao, 2015) that cater primarily to neoliberal metrics. Greater awareness and acceptance of non-traditional research methods, critical theoretical paradigms, and embedded community research will be needed, as well as greater sensitivity to non-Eurocentric approaches to knowledge building that can effectively engage with diversity and disadvantage locally and globally.

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