

KEYNOTE: Giving voice to “alternative economies”: A pluralistic framing of post-industrial tourism

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Decades of boosterist tourism strategies has produced overwhelming effects in the sociocultural fabric of tourist destinations. Social stratification, disintegrating communities and the transformation of residential neighbourhoods into sterile tourist enclaves has triggered alternative grassroots initiatives to reignite diverse, equitable and liveable communities. The plea for morally right alternatives was soon responded by global peer economy platforms, positioning themselves as the disruptive protagonists of “localhood”. In contrast, contemporary critiques contend that the communitarian rhetoric of sharing/collaborative economy is a mere disguise of a fundamentally neoliberalist, profit extracting business model, and warn against the unforeseeable consequences of a “capitalism on steroids”. Within such a contested (political and discursive field), tourism researchers need to navigate particularly carefully. Nevertheless, it is our task to move beyond simple (advocating or critical) positions, by developing a framework of evidence-based study of the collaborative economy.

This keynote speech calls for giving voice to the “alternatives” through a pluralistic framing of the issues arising along disruptive innovations. To understand the complexity and paradoxes of collaborative endeavours, we must acknowledge their contingency and analyse their entanglements with the wider social and political texture of places. Drawing on theories of alternative economies (Gibson- Graham, 2008; Healy, 2009) as well as illustrations from recent empirical studies of peer accommodation rental, it will deconstruct the collaborative economy as an intrinsically heterogenous space, where mainstream capitalist and alternative economies coexist in a mutually constitutive way. This is by far from a simple descriptive exercise – by giving voice to alternatives, social scientists commit themselves to an activist epistemic position. The keynote will also discuss how we, as tourism scholars can play a more active role in performing inclusive and sustainable futures for the destinations we study.