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Is an axiological turn viable for tourism studies? Reinvestigating the Platforms model

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Abstract

Tourism academics are institutionalised to enhance values determined to be of benefit to some greater good, and to play their assigned roles in both conscious and unconscious ways. Many find themselves in different faculties, colleges, and schools, doing their jobs based on values determined by their institutional belonging, but also based on their personal beliefs, and educational backgrounds.

This interplay of academic roles is important because it creates worlds, real and imagined, that students, colleagues, and community members build theirs from. Worlds are made and evaluated quite naturally, they form and are formed by the academics' values in interplay with the values of their contexts. Each tourism academic should therefore ask themselves: Why is tourism taught? This question might highlight vulnerabilities and viabilities of tourism studies.

This article presents an investigation of tourism degrees offered at universities in the five Nordic countries. The data exposes what values dominate tourism education, but the significance of the argument in this paper arises from the theoretical framework, which is an axiological development of Jafar Jafari's original Platforms model and its later adaptations. The conclusion drawn is that current tourism studies ought to be enriched axiologically, rather than ontologically or epistemologically.

Keywords: Axiology; Values; Tourism Studies; Tourism Higher Education (HE); Platforms Model; Conscience

Contextualisation of axiological vulnerabilities in tourism curricula

Many fears and hopes are tied to a curriculum because it determines for a foreseeable future what an academic's daily realities will be like. Academic work is often divided into three components; teaching; research; and different kinds of service functions to the institution they belong, or to an external community (Hsu et al., 2017). Central to much of this is teaching, and the curriculum that this teaching takes place within, because it determines how individual academics can or cannot integrate their research interest in the teaching they are expected to do, and how they can plan their daily lives. Dianne Dredge and her colleagues aptly name the space curricula exist in a 'force field' between different internal and external stakeholder forces (2012).

Dredge et al's model, and the work they created for tourism, hospitality and events curricula in Australia (2013) has been a source of inspiration in many rounds of curriculum development, and so has John Tribe's philosophic practitioner model (2002). This article has also been influenced by the work of colleagues active at different times in the *Tourism Education Futures Initiative* (TEFI). A network of colleagues formed by the work of Pauline Sheldon and Dan Fesenmaier, TEFI has for some twenty years actively been working for a transformation of tourism and hospitality curricula from a single-minded industrial viewpoint to a holistic values-based foundation that aims to benefit the communities in which tourism takes place (Sheldon et al., 2011; Sheldon et al., 2008). The article will build on these foundations, especially focusing on what *values* are, and how unearthing axiologies in action in tourism curricula will be necessary to discover viabilities and vulnerabilities of tourism research.

Metaphorically speaking; research paves new roads into unknown territory, whereas education stays grounded on familiar soil. This is the point this article is trying to make when it examines viabilities and vulnerabilities: If the familiar is always defined and perceived in a

specific way, then any new territories sought for will always follow the same lines. Students and future colleagues that are influenced by the educator's choices, might therefore be blinded from alternatives much closer at hand, or off in a totally different direction that they never realised existed. Academics are vulnerable to make the worlds they live and act in too narrow if they never see the viabilities that exist outside their framed realities. In theoretical terms, the paradigmatic choices that are made rely on the educator's worldviews (Munar & Jamal, 2016). The ontologies adhered to paint vivid and personally self-evident images of the beings individuals exist in (Lawson, 2019), and the meanings placed on actions and objects guides *how* tourism is taught. The epistemological traditions, educators are brought up in, guide the knowledges and truths they believe in (Tribe & Liburd, 2016), and guide *what* they consider necessary to teach. However, it is educators' axiological core that determines *why* they value tourism like they do, and why they consider some matters worthy of including in a curriculum (Edelheim et al., 2022).

The article will briefly examine the research on tourism curricula and present the framework built on two bases: on the one hand, on developments of the 'Platforms model' of tourism research by Jafar Jafari, and on the other, on axiological research. It will also show how these two bases can be combined to act as an analytical tool for the viability of tourism curricula and research. The methodology is qualitative contents analysis, deemed suitable to collect and sort data from heterogenous source material, and to interpret priorities of choices made as well as wordings of statements of purpose. The empirical material has been collected from all the higher education (HE) tourism curricula in use in five Nordic countries. The significance of this article is its novel use of axiological thoughts to reinvestigate the Platforms model.

Curriculum research in tourism higher education and worldmaking capacities

International research of curricula in tourism HE has followed several distinct perspectives. Twenty years ago, John Tribe reviewed articles in the field of tourism education and found that a vast majority of them examined curricula (2002), mainly aiming to scope an evolving field. However, later reviews of tourism HE articles have shown that curricula have taken a less prominent role, which in the words of David Airey can be considered a sign of the field's maturity (2008a, 2008b). Cathy Hsu (2015), and Hsu with colleagues in a follow-up article (2017), analysed tourism HE articles published from 2005 to 2014 and found that the field has changed. The most common field of analysis was Teaching & Learning, followed by Student development and Curricula. Hsu states: 'While curriculum continues to be an important topic for discussion, most programmes have chosen their curriculum space and have had time to conduct necessary evaluations and adjustments' (2015, pp. 5-6).

A key field of tourism HE research has analysed how appropriate different stakeholder groups, such as educators, students, alumni, or tourism entrepreneurs and managers perceive an existing curriculum (Kim & Jeong, 2018). Differences between stakeholder groups are often highlighted, and thereafter presented as challenges to the success of education (Mei, 2019). Some research has focused on specific countries (e.g., Boyle, 2015; Telfer & Hashimoto, 2001), whereas others have made comparisons between different tourism curricula (Leung et al., 2018; Oktadiana & Chon, 2017).

In the early 2000s, Keith Hollinshead introduced the concept of 'Worldmaking' to Tourism studies, and has continued building on this concept with colleagues ever since (Hollinshead, 2004b; Hollinshead et al., 2009). The core argument of these articles has been to highlight how tourism as a phenomenon in society, but also in academia, is wittingly as well as unwittingly 'manufacturing or correct[ing] held designations or expressions about culture, heritage, nature, whatever' (Hollinshead & Suleman, 2018, p. 204). In this frame, the

tourism curriculum is a powerful document, as it is full of clues about how its makers value tourism by including, excluding, and even hiding some aspects of the phenomenon.

This article aims to perform a ‘double hermeneutics’ (Hollinshead & Suleman, 2017) of tourism HE by highlighting possible vulnerabilities because distinct socio-political ‘worlds’ are ‘made’ through the curricula academics are part of defending and developing. In Tribe’s words ‘decisions to frame courses in a narrow part of curriculum space need to be made conscious of the situatedness of course designers in particular ideological streams and mindful of the consequences of narrow specialisation’ (2005, p. 59). The paths students choose in their lives after graduation are influenced by the worldmaking that educators and researchers are involved in when designing the curricula. Baruchello (2018), building on Marcel and Augustinian philosophy, refers to *homo viator*, and the metaphorical and actual journeys humans are cast to travel through their lives, and how the relations they form during their travel shape their being. Thus, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ tourism are born long before any final acts, they are born in the values tourism stakeholders are brought up in.

While there is a wealth of research investigating values of tourism HE under a multitude of different headings, little research in tourism HE has so far overtly taken as its focus the axiology of the curricula (recent work by de Bernardi, 2022; Edelheim et al., 2022 being the exceptions). This is the gap in viabilities and vulnerabilities this article focusses on. Jafari’s Platforms model is used to frame this discussion and to suggest how it can be updated with an axiological angle.

The Platforms model

Jafar Jafari’s Platforms model (1990, 2001, 2005) is an exploration of how tourism research and education have evolved over time. An alternative genealogy of tourism theory has been introduced in Richard Butler’s ‘eras of tourism research’ (2015). Butler focused,

however, on how tourism developed in society, and on research thereof, not on education explicitly, and is thus not suitable as an analytical model for this article. Contrastingly, Jafari's model follows the developmental history of tourism studies and education: how and in what contexts did tourism, and its related epistemology and theory, develop from the 1950s to the new millennium. His original paper presented four 'platforms': advocacy, cautionary, adaptancy and knowledge-based. Jafari highlighted that none of the platforms replaced or closed others out, rather all exist simultaneously (2001, p. 29). Since its introduction, general education focussed applications and summaries of Jafari's model have been published by Airey (2008b), and Barkathunnisha et al, (2017; 2019), and in Hardy et al (2002) and Macbeth (2005), who aligned it with a sustainability focus.

In a thought piece published in 2005, Jafari suggested a fifth platform which he referred to as the public outreach platform. He proposed that the knowledge-based platform was too insular and abstracted from tourism as a practice, and that the fifth platform should actively reach out beyond its own borders to other fields and applied research (Jafari, 2005). Another development of the Platforms model was simultaneously proposed by Jim Macbeth (2005), and it has later been more widely accepted and referred to by other researchers. Macbeth criticised Jafari's theory as not being current, especially as none of the other platforms directly considered either the ethics of decision-making, or sustainable development, both of which are issues impacting tourism, tourism research, and tourism education directly (2005, p. 964). His proposal included two new platforms. While the fifth platform (sustainability), which was in his mind a distinct and evident paradigm different from the four previous platforms, the sixth (ethics) was not an established platform, but rather a suggestion of what Macbeth considered necessary for the future. Although Ann Hardy et al (2002) had earlier indicated that sustainability could be found in Jafari's third and fourth platform, Macbeth

dismissed this only by indicating why it was different from the knowledge-based platform.

This dismissal will be discussed later in this paper.

Macbeth (2005) argued that sustainable development had reached far beyond the research community and had become a common attribute in society at large. Current examples of this are how different HE curricula include the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Farsari, 2021), or their precursor the Millennium Development Goals (Lapointe et al., 2018). However, sustainability is also a politically debated concept and different stakeholder groups perceive it differently based on what ethical values they want to emphasise (Macbeth, 2005, p. 967). In fact, ethics was one of the features Tribe also highlighted in his proposal for holistic tourism curricula in the philosophic practitioner theory (2002). That is, students should reflect on and critically evaluate their own acts and deeds in the tourism sector as a part of society and surrounding ecology.

Examples of research conducted in the spirit of Macbeth's proposed sixth platform, is the 'moral turn' tourism education is said to have taken (Caton, 2012, 2015). This is a development where researchers have more actively started to query knowledge production and power structures inherent in academia and society (Ayikoru et al., 2009). As David Airey has earlier proposed: tourism education as a distinct field in HE has developed from mere mapping exercises of tourism and training of a workforce to broader discussions about the values it is formed on (Airey, 2008b, p. 28).

Following the ethics platform, and the moral turn referred to by Caton (2012), a spiritual turn has been introduced. Abu Bakar Barkathunnisha and colleagues (2017; 2019; 2020, and 2021) proposed a seventh platform of tourism education; a spirituality-based platform. On this platform, the content and practice of tourism HE should be holistic and incorporate moral, social, economic, and spiritual dimensions of tourism in society (Barkathunnisha et al., 2017, p. 175). On the spirituality-based platform, students are guided

to find personal meaning in their education and encouraged to actively participate in the creation of global wellbeing. This platform is based upon a broad definition of spirituality and is distinct from religion (Barkathunnisha et al., 2019).

Looking at the different platforms that have been proposed, it can be established that the original four stances as proposed by Jafari (1990) were based on different paradigmatic shifts in tourism studies and education. The following platforms, however, have mainly been proposed as necessary extensions, not as descriptions of paradigmatic shifts that have occurred. While sustainability was in Macbeth's article (2005) meant to represent a new paradigm, Hardy et al (2002) had suggested that it was already a part of the third (adaptancy) and the fourth (knowledge-based) platforms. Macbeth disputed the latter, but he gave no arguments for rejecting the former. Considering that all platforms have developed over time, and are not replaced by one another but rather continue to exist, one must ask, how do the different platforms live on, evolve, and develop, and most importantly, what is their current status?

An assumption that seems to persist in much research using the Platforms model is that the initial platform (advocacy) lives on as business and management-focused research. The second platform (cautionary) agreed in principle on the positive impacts, but research on this platform highlighted negative impacts of tourism. This position still exists in both research and educational settings. For example, Higgins-Desbiolles (2021) analysed a public debate between tourism researchers in which cautionary voices against a quick recovery from the COVID-19 outbreak were accused of being 'at war with tourism'. In her analysis, she shows that any cautionary voices are perceived by stakeholders, close to the advocacy platform, as having a negative stance towards tourism per se. However, Higgins-Desbiolles argues that colleagues voicing cautionary opinions, in fact, care a lot for tourism and for sustained common goods to communities.

The third platform (adaptancy) was focused on finding reasonable solutions to the negative impacts, and this is indeed where much of what Macbeth (2005) referred to as ‘weak sustainability’ research is positioned today. Sustainable tourism is in the public’s mind often connected to adapting otherwise negative outcomes. So are often other concepts aligned with ‘strong sustainability’ (Macbeth, 2005), such as ‘responsibility’ or ‘regeneration’, which are initially developed with a ‘deep green’ mindset but later co-opted into marketing terms by operators and governments that are, if anything, aiming for adaptancy. The fourth platform (knowledge-based) lives on in two ways. This platform is where much of the so-called pure research happens, in humanities as well as in natural sciences, and where future developments are created. However, the knowledge-based platform is also exemplified in the ‘publish-or-perish’ mindset in which research in many cases seems to be produced purely for its own sake, rather than for tourism stakeholders, to fulfil the need to boost different personal or institutional metrics (Wassler & Fan, 2021).

Thus, if the fifth platform (sustainability) is incorporated already into the third platform, then what about the sixth (ethics) and the seventh (spirituality)? Do they belong in any of the original platforms? A common theme in much research critical of the strong vocational emphasis of business and management studies, has been a call for change in mindset. This article suggests that this call for change is how the cautionary platform has evolved over time. Jafari’s cautionary platform has in later research been portrayed as the metaphorical ‘wet blanket’ of all the joy tourism brings. In revisions of the Platforms model, it has been described as focusing mainly, if not entirely, on negative *impacts* and how to avoid them. This, however, was not how Jafari initially described the platform. He referred to ‘a wave of studies which focused on the sociocultural aspects of tourism and brought benefits of tourism under scrutiny. [...] As subscribers to these two platforms have stood by their respective positions, cross-firing between them has been inevitable’ (1990, pp. 33 and 35).

This article proposes that the cautionary platform is unfittingly named. It is not so much ‘caution’ that researchers in this platform are declaring, but rather ‘conscience’. For anyone who has ever done a pleasurable act deemed to be ‘wrong’ according to social norms, science, or whatever, having a bad conscience is an annoying side effect that might kill the entire joy of the act. People know that flying is bad for the environment, but they carry on flying, even to conferences on sustainable tourism (Gössling et al., 2019). Different from the adaptancy platform which tries to come up with a way to carry on in a slightly less damaging way, conscience builds more on arguments created through values, rather than on epistemological arguments. The conscience platform is also different from the purely theoretical knowledge-based platform as it always emphasises the need for action and activation of students.

Pritchard and colleagues introduced ‘hopeful tourism’ (2011); Tribe the ‘philosophic practitioner’ (2002); Hollinshead ‘worldmaking’ (2004); Sheldon and colleagues ‘values-based’ education (2011); Macbeth suggested an ‘ethics platform’ (2005); Caton proposed a ‘moral turn’ (2012); and finally, Barkathunnisha a ‘spirituality-based platform’ (2017). Different names, but they all share the common emphasis on how values need to be overtly incorporated into the tourism curriculum. Airey (2008b) referred to the second platform as a time of fragmentation as researchers from different academic fields entered tourism studies and brought their approaches along. Perhaps, now is the time to realise that the fragmentation is purely an ontological and epistemological vulnerability, while simultaneously reflecting an axiological viability. Representatives of fields collected on this platform might embody different worldviews and truth claims, but they are united in questioning values taken for granted on other platforms.

This article therefore proposes that the second platform in Jafari’s model should be renamed the Conscience platform. It is a platform that builds on distinct axiological

awareness. Is not a platform purely built on values per se, because values are fluid and situation dependent. While values need to be backed up with knowledge and meaning, it is also true in reverse; knowledge and meaning need values to acknowledge negative effects of their application.

Thus, the conscience platform incorporates all the different turns, research directions, and educational directions that focus on the importance of values. The next section will investigate why a more pronounced investigation of axiology could enrich tourism research and highlight potential vulnerabilities and viabilities in tourism curricula.

Axiology in tourism HE

Different tourism HE curricula can be investigated based on their foundational philosophies: epistemology, ontology, and axiology. Firstly, epistemological arguments are necessary but not helpful when investigating humanities and social sciences due to their inherent linguistic power structure (Belhassen & Caton, 2009). To determine what a tourism HE curricula should be like purely from an epistemological perspective will always be based on the reality of that colleague, how they value tourism HE, thus the fragmentation mentioned earlier. Secondly, ontological questions are also necessary, for example by establishing that people adhering to different scientific fields will interpret reality in different ways, and thus reach mutually exclusive results, whereas in their own field, both are created coherently epistemologically (Hollinshead, 2004a).

At the core of using axiology as a foundational philosophy is the quest to examine values, and value-decisions involved in locating tourism schools in specific faculties, creating tourism programmes, determining their content, now and in the future. Values are complex to investigate, so complex that many proponents of values do not realise that they are ‘sitting in the same boat’ as their personal values might differ. Values are also commonly attacked both

by modernists and constructivists as being helplessly ‘subjective’ and relativist. Indeed, although axiology is by no means a simple foundational philosophy to follow, the aim of the next section is to show how it can be usefully applied, beyond accusations of relativism or extreme essentialism (Gallarza & Gil, 2008).

Axiology and values

It is important to acknowledge one’s values and to unravel in-built values of the surrounding world. The importance stems from the fact that values are always active. They are the result of constant evaluation, which is something everyone does every day, every moment of their lives, consciously and unconsciously. From the moment one wakes up until one has fallen asleep again, one evaluates how to act, what to do, what to believe in, and what not. One lives through values, one lives axiologically. Axiology is often confused with studies of ethics or aesthetics, but that is a fallacy. Axiology, as a field of investigation, is according to Hartman (2019) not about determinations of what is good or bad in a moral sense, or in the sense of taste. Instead, it is about ‘the principle of value’ (2019, p. 23) or, more precisely, ‘a method of thinking which one is free to use and, consequently, develop one’s own sense of value’ (2019, p. 53).

Stating that values are subjective, or objective are epistemological claims, undermined by the fact that all truth claims derive from evaluations of set perimeters created by humans, they do not exist in a separate ‘untainted’ realm. Similarly, investigating what is *meant* by values, or what their *existence* could be, are ontological problems, and thus outside the scope of an axiological study (McDonald, 2004). But to claim, as will be done below, that there are values that could be considered better or worse than others might sound permissive to a personal agenda. However, this article follows the lead of McMurtry’s axiom of life-value (2009-10, 2013), and of Hartman’s (2019) hierarchy of values.

McMurtry’s primary axiom of value states that:

X is value if and only if, and to the extent that, X consists in or enables a more coherently inclusive range of *thought* (T = internal image and concept) / *feeling* (F = the felt side of being; senses, desires, emotions, moods) / *action* (A = animate movement across species and organizations) than without it.

Conversely:

X is disvalue if and only if, and to the extent that, X reduces/disables any range of thought/experience/action (McMurtry, 2009-10, p. 213).

This axiom provides an opening to what values and disvalues are. Rather than being seen as relative opinions that different people hold, they refer to entities that have either positive or negative effects on thoughts, feelings, and actions. As that is still rather theoretical, McMurtry goes on by explaining what a life-value is:

the most basic and universal life-matters are already decided beneath the social rules and people's opinions – such as that all people need sufficient nutriment, clean water, sewage facilities, learning of society's symbol systems, home and love, and expert care when ill if their life-capacities are not to be reduced or destroyed. [...]

For whatever the self's desires, deprivation of any of these life goods leads to loss of life-capacity towards dehumanization and physical death (2013, p. 1).

The most important aspect is thus life, not just human life, but all life. As a premise for all value and for all values is life in its different forms. Without ensuring life, nothing else maintains value. Life-values for McMurtry are *needs* without which life cannot go on. Noonan, building on McMurtry, distinguishes between needs and wants; 'deprivations of needs always lead to harm whereas deprivations of wants is only harmful in light of revisable self-interpretations' (2006, p. xiv). This leads us to Hartman and the hierarchy of values he

created with three dimensions: *intrinsic* (internal, affective or singular), *extrinsic* (behavioural or external), and *systemic* (conceptual or synthetic) values.

In this hierarchy, *intrinsic* values are those that are good for their own sake, namely living things. Edwards (2010) states that intrinsic values are based on the entity's consciousness and self-awareness, its creativity and capacity to value, an end *to, in, and for* itself. Some philosophers include in this category only human beings, others expand it to all conscious beings (Hartman, 2019), some refer to non-human animals (Edwards, 2010), with the widest inclusion taking into account plants (McMurtry, 2009-10). Without delving into animism, we see McMurtry's argument about life-value, quoted above, as the reason to take a holistic perspective when including all living beings into intrinsic values.

Extrinsic values are, in Edwards' (2010) terms, useful or potentially useful objects, processes, or activities. He states, '[e]xtrinsic properties are spatiotemporal properties existing in our common perceptual environment, our shared everyday world of space-time as given to us in ordinary sense experience' (2010, p. 60). The third layer, systemic values, is important because it signals a rejection of abstractions as a central component. An idea can be limitlessly worthy and good, but it can never think itself. It has to be thought by a living entity.

Thus, this article proposes a way to integrate axiology into the Platforms model and show its practical implications and viabilities. Figure 1 below is based on an idea proposed by Barkathunnisha and colleagues (2019). By contrast, in this article's figure, the new platforms have been rejected, and the second platform has been renamed to incorporate the later developments. The figure proposes which teaching style is most prevalent, one-way transmission, two-way transaction, or mutual transformation (Miller, 2019). Finally, the platforms have been divided based on which step of the axiological hierarchy each represent and aim for: systemic, extrinsic, or intrinsic values.

Figure 1 approximately here

Before delving into this article's methods and empirics, a metaphoric story will illustrate how the axiological hierarchy is connected to the different platforms.

Imagine that tourism is like a cacao tree. The tree and the beans it produces represent life and are intrinsic values; they are good for their own sake. The tree exists and acts in symbiosis with its surroundings, sometimes depending on external actors, such as insects to pollinate, and sometimes by feeding other organisms. Now, on the advocacy platform, humans consider the tree as a resource that they can exploit. The beans can be picked and turned into nutritious or delicious products for humans to consume. Picking a bean and preparing it for consumption represents an extrinsic value as it is a spatiotemporal act that leads to the consumption of the bean which in turn can maintain a person's life, thus an intrinsic value. The tree gets a monetary value, which is the abstract idea where an entity is given an exchange value based on rational or irrational comparisons of how much or little of other abstract values are needed to be 'paid' for what the tree produces. Monetary value is always a systemic value, neither extrinsic nor intrinsic, something perfectly exemplified through times of inflation, and governmental monetary stimulus packages – money per se has no value, only our perception of what its (systemic) exchange value represents.

Now, along comes the conscience platform which informs the advocacy platform that the tree is not limitless, as it might wither and die if all surrounding nutrients are taken away from it and too many humans trample the earth around it. Additionally, the tree demands enormous amounts of water which is a scarce resource. The conscience platform also reminds them about the exploitation of labour force, the power of international buyers over producers, potential health risks of eating too much chocolate and on they go, real wet blankets to all the joy that the advocacy platform representatives foreshadowed.

The two are joined by the adaptancy platform which informs them about sustainable practices and corporate social responsibilities which might minimise the harm done, but still allow for the cacao bean to be exploited, as also the adaptancy platform considers systemic values to be more important than intrinsic values. Finally, the knowledge-based platform retreats to its laboratory where machines are invented to help with picking, soil enhancement to help with growth, dental hygiene products and obesity treatment products to alleviate the downsides of eating too much chocolate – a range of extrinsic and systemic values aimed at enhancing the intrinsic value of the cocoa tree and its produce. The conscience platform, however, is accused of hating cocoa beans and of disallowing people from enjoying them, but that misses the point. The conscience platform does also appreciate the cocoa bean and the tree it came from, and it wishes for the tree to live a good and healthy life. To ensure this, it asks for a transformation of values where systemic monetary values are not put first, but rather holistic values which benefit the whole ecosystem. For this they are sneered at as silly ‘tree-huggers’ who live with their heads in the clouds, not understanding the realities of the society they inhabit.

Data, Methods, and Methodology

Data selection and collection

This article argues that the Nordic region functions as an interesting case on a global scale as it exemplifies neoliberal commodification of the HE sector in action. Their education systems were long known as publicly funded, free for anyone to attend, and inclusive in that they were geographically present all over the region (Vabø & Aamodt, 2008). Whereas the public investment is still large in an international comparison, other things have changed substantially now that most have some form of fee structures (Vabø & Wiers-Jenssen, 2017), and many smaller institutions have merged, or amalgamated into larger HE providers.

The Nordic countries – hereafter the Nordics, are five nations (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) making up the North-west of Europe. The countries represent less than four percent of Europe’s population, whilst their combined land mass is more than a third of Europe’s size. As a result, education is spread out over a large geographic area and comprises dominantly of many smaller institutions. This is also true for the HE sector with 179 institutions in total, see Table 1 below.

HE in the Nordics has in the past two decades gone through several reforms in the wake of the Bologna process, instilled by the European Union (EU). Iceland and Norway are not EU members, but all Nordic countries follow roughly the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in their current educational set-ups (Gornitzka, 2007). The four HE levels of the EQF are 5-8, where Level 5 is called a short cycle, generally referring to a post-secondary certificate or diploma. Level 6 is a bachelor education, Level 7 a masters’, or postgraduate education, and Level 8 a doctoral education.

HE is offered in a range of different institutions. Finland has two types of HE providers, Norway and Sweden have four types, and Denmark has five types of HE providers, as shown in Table 1 below. Iceland is the only country that does not separate these into different entities.

Table 1 approximately here

This study focuses only on institutions offering tourism as its own major degree, thus eliminating providers offering tourism as a minor inside other disciplines. This is an ongoing research project, and the data included in this article has been collected from January 2019 until March 2022 from publicly available online sources. All programmes available for students to apply to, either in English or in one of the five native languages spoken in the Nordics, were examined.

Approximately a quarter (44) of the total 179 HE providers in the Nordics have Tourism majors at some level, see Table 2 below. There are a total of 100 separate degrees on offer, thus approximately 2.5 degrees per institution that offer some kind of tourism program.

Table 2 approximately here

Table 3 shows that more than half of tourism majors are housed in faculties of social sciences (inclusive of business and management), approximately 15% in natural sciences, and 11% in humanities. Almost 16% of the institutions do not belong to separate faculties. This is especially the case for university colleges in Denmark and Finland. It is noteworthy, especially with the strong emphasis on tourism's connection with design, culture, and creative industries, that only one programme is housed in a combined arts and humanities faculty.

Table 3 approximately here

Separate spreadsheets were created for each country and for information about the schools, departments, and faculties to which each degree belonged. Each degree's mission statement (general overview, programme description, structure, learning outcomes and, prospective career outcomes), the language of instruction, and each individual unit included in the programmes were also collected. The units' names, objectives, outcomes, teaching methods, and assessable items were individualised to further analyse what kind of purposes and values each separate syllabi and curricula were based on.

Methodology

The methodology, critical content analysis, was chosen based on both practical and academic reasons. The practical aspect relates to the amount of data available (a total of 100 separate degrees, each with an average of 44 separate units) and the heterogeneity of the data

(seven different teaching languages, five different types of higher education institutions, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, mandatory and elective units) and the wish to create an overview of a field that usually only appears as separate entities. Critical content analysis was deemed as suitable to take full advantage of large datasets (Hillman & Radel, 2018). All data were transcribed and collected in comparable formats, making it possible to see broader trends. The analysis included what the separate programmes included, how the programmes were taught, and most importantly why different components, methods, objectives, and assessments were used. Naturally, this final dimension was a case of inference of purposes, rather than a direct reading. This is the reason why critical content analysis, rather than a quantitative content analysis was used (Saukko, 2003), as it allows for results to be reported also through discourses uncovered. Common critiques of content analysis is that it is only useful to explore new phenomena where scant data exist about similar cases from before, or where contextual information is not needed (Dumay & Cai, 2014). Other criticisms highlight effects of biases which may lead researchers ‘to draw inferential conclusions from data’ (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991, p. 244). Considering these weaknesses this project uses multiple coders to ensure consistency and awareness of potential biases. The data was also deemed to be broad and novel enough not to simply repeat already existing studies.

The introductory paragraphs outlining programmes on the institutions’ websites are the most significant value-laden sections. This is where the institution and their representatives, often the faculty in cooperation with communication and marketing specialists, describe their programmes based on everything they personally value, and what they imagine others will value too. Another place where one can observe values are the outcomes of the degrees, both the academic ones, and those relating to career options after graduation. Many countries have set standards for what universities need to report on, such as explicating which knowledge, skills, and competences graduating students should possess. However, many also report on

what kind of tasks the programmes' alumni are involved in to give interested stakeholders (in many cases prospective applicants and current students), an idea of the diverse options that await them after graduation.

The data was compared to the educational aims, outcomes, and styles as described in Figure 1, and the axiological level that the degrees mainly aimed for was inferred. This article is an extension of earlier publications (e.g., Tillonen & Edelheim, 2022), and their discussion about platforms. The resulting Figure 1 has come about through the dissonance in earlier rounds of data analysis. All seven platforms were used as described by Barkathunnisha (2017, 2019) in an earlier text, but it was difficult to distinguish the cautionary, adaptancy, sustainability and ethics platforms from one another. Thus, the resulting closer reading of Jafari's original text, and others building on it, led to the current analytical framework.

Nordic Tourism curricula – findings and discussion

Overview of degrees

Each degree has a short introduction on its website informing about specific features of the degree, and often also mentioning a possible outcome. The presentations are compact, at an average of 140 words ranging from 36 words to 555 words. The presentation texts differ from one another in many ways; they are created based on each institution's rules and guidelines, and their rationale is to create a rapid overview of the degree, and how it differs from other degrees at the same institution, and from similar degrees at competing institutions.

A separation of the degrees into the four platforms (see Table 4) shows an interesting spread of the values that shape the Nordic tourism HE curricula. The largest group (44 % of all degrees) firmly represents the adaptancy platform by presenting their programme in the following words:

“The tourism sector contributes 9% to the world's GDP and is continuously growing. As such, the tourism sector is becoming increasingly important outside the industrial world and hence it is increasingly crucial to the development of the world as a whole. The tourism sector, however, is also increasingly facing ever more sustainability challenges, socially, ecologically and financially” (Uppsala University, Master's Programme in Sustainable Destination Development).

This was a rather typical approach, initially referring to the size, or the growth of tourism, alternatively its importance to the region, and then with words of how such ‘positives’ need to be managed successfully for the sector to thrive. The second largest group (31 %) was the advocacy platform. Here a majority came from university colleges, especially programmes based at EQF 5 level, aiming for certificates and diplomas. Some degrees were largely advocating in their tone, but a few words or sentences showed that the degree included adaptancy, for example:

“Master’s Degree Programme in Tourism Marketing and Management is not only about making money; we aim to make tourism better. Better for tourism businesses, better for tourists, better for the environment and better for local communities” (University of Eastern Finland).

The introduction starts from the advocacy platform, but reminds the reader that other things, apart from money, are also important.

Table 4 approximately here

Conscience is the platform with least degrees attached to it, though Norway with almost a fifth of their programmes in this category is an outlier, and Denmark is not far behind. It was also in Norway where one degree is presented in ‘the Era of Climate Crisis’, others directly state what values they are based upon. One Norwegian and one Finnish degree are the

only two, out of one hundred examined, that mention the COVID-19 crisis directly and suggest that it provides the sector with an opportunity to rethink its values. Denmark has a few programmes that mention that their aim is to educate ‘philosophic practitioners’, and in Sweden one institution highlights issues of politics, equality, and Eurocentrism as matters in need of attention for tourism practitioners.

The knowledge-based platform is mainly found at research-intensive universities. These programmes are presented from the perspective of how learning about, and creating theories through research projects, make up substantial parts of the studies. Iceland is an outlier in this category, but with only 10 degrees to compare from any tendency involving the Icelandic programmes on their own becomes skewed.

Learning outcomes illustrate what kind of skills and knowledge students are perceived to need in their studies and in their careers after graduation. Learning outcomes portray how tourism is perceived, and what kind of tourism the institutions are part of creating. Several curricula had traces of at least two different platforms, a finding that exemplifies Jafari’s suggestion that different platforms are not mutually exclusive. The determination of what platform each degree mainly represents is based upon the primary values highlighted in separate syllabi. For example, a degree with sustainability as a minor, or included as elective units, was not perceived to be an example of the adaptancy platform if sustainability was not a recurring theme in the degree as a whole.

Vulnerabilities, viabilities and axiological implications

This article set out to analyse values underpinning tourism curricula in the Nordic countries, and later developments of Jafari’s Platforms model were selected to act as its theoretical framework. Whereas the empirical findings from the Nordics might be thin in this article, the main finding here was how Jafari’s original model can be updated based on an

axiological reading. The article set out to examine potential vulnerabilities in one geographic region, but stumbled instead upon axiological viabilities inherent in all tourism research.

It was in the struggle to estimate which degree belonged to which platform that the authors were forced to consider their own values, and to honestly try to consider how the proposed new platforms differed from earlier platforms. The realisation that the authors probably represent the metaphorical ‘wet blanket’ of tourism research was hard to accept, but simultaneously liberating. The authors are not at war with tourism (or cacao), they love tourism, and want tourism to be taken seriously on its own, not just because of some systemic values attached to it. Conscience is something all academics need to take seriously. Simply hoping for a technofix (Huesemann & Huesemann, 2011) to solve all challenges caused by modern growth addicted anthropocene societies will not be enough. Burying one’s head in the sand will not stop the catastrophic climate changes that are happening, neither will it solve inequity struggles that is rife in tourism practice and scholarship. Creating small managerial responses to make it more bearable is not enough, academics need to transform the foundations they build upon.

Kate Raworth states that society needs to shape economies that thrive, not economies that are dependent on growth (2018). It is common knowledge that some growth is good and necessary, but other growth is scary and at times lethal, such as cancerous growth. McMurtry is indeed suggesting that society has reached the ‘cancer stage of capitalism’, not in a metaphorical way per se, but literally as capitalism can be likened with an organism that attaches itself to a living being and exploits it for its own benefit until the host organism dies (2013). Researchers need therefore to learn to separate good growth from bad growth, and one way of doing this is by paying closer attention to axiology, and the underlying values that shape our realities.

Thus, what are *vulnerabilities* vis-à-vis axiology in tourism studies? Axiology deals with values, and values are vulnerable to accusations of being relative, subjective, and hard to measure. This article has explained that these accusations are erroneous as they are based on epistemological or ontological arguments that are not fully appreciating their own axiological foundations. Therefore, when tourism academics are communicating with stakeholders from all aspects of society, they need to have clear cut messages, appreciated for the value(s) they bring to communities. Currently, many colleagues communicate systemic values, linked to abstract ideas such as ‘growth’, ‘development’ or ‘money’. However, what they need to do is to highlight intrinsic life-values. This requires both an appreciation of their own axiological foundations, and a change in mindset as to what is important long-term, and for holistic wellbeing of communities.

Vitalities vis-a-a-vis axiology in tourism studies is rather straight forward. Values philosophy brings together many connected but fragmented fields. Their common nominator is life-values that form a logical alternative to market-led neoliberalism. Communities, ecosystems, human and non-human individuals, all are dependent on a holistic understanding of life-value. Accepting that science and existence is value-full is a first important step to unleash these viabilities.

Finally, *consequences* of tourism studies not taking the turn towards axiology is that the field carries on being part of the challenges of humanity. Catastrophic climate changes are already visible around the world, and unreversible damage is being made daily due to short-sighted advice from colleagues who claim that they are values-free. Future research theses should always include axiological foundations, together with their epistemological and ontological ones, because knowledge and existence that forgets the values that underpin them is blind to the worlds that they make for themselves and others.

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Table 1 Types of Nordic HEs

Nordic countries											
Iceland	Universities and University colleges	7									7
Finland	Universities	14	Universities of Applied Sciences	21						35	
Norway	Universities	10	Scientific Colleges	9	Colleges	13	Colleges with accredited study programmes	17			49
Sweden	Universities	18	University Colleges	12	Art, design, and music academies	5	Independent education providers	13			48
Denmark	Universities	8	University Colleges	7	Artistic higher education institutions	12	Schools of Maritime Education and Training	5	Business Academies	8	40
Total		57		49		30		35		8	179

Table 2 Number and type of Nordic Tourism HEs

Nordic HE institutions	179	100%
Institutions with Tourism programmes	44	24.44%
Number of Tourism programmes in total	100	100%
Certificate - Diploma	12	12.00%
Bachelor	55	55.00%
Master	32	32.00%
Bachelor & Master	1	1.00%

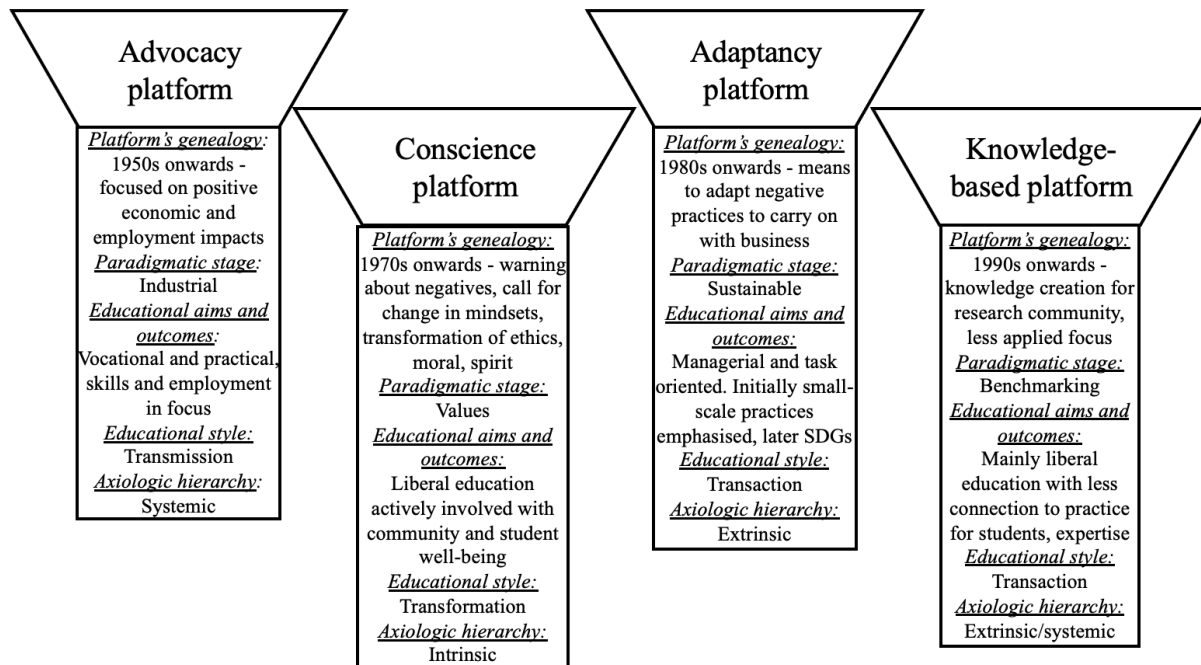
Table 3 Faculty belonging of Nordic Tourism HEs

Natural sciences	6.5	14.77%
Social sciences	25	56.82%
Humanities	5	11.36%
Arts	0.5	1.14%
None	7	15.91%
Total	44	100.00%

Table 4 Nordic Tourism HEs divided into four axiologically-informed platforms

Platform / Country	Advocacy	Conscience	Adaptancy	Knowledge- based	Sum
Denmark	9 (60 %)	2 (13.3 %)	2 (13.3 %)	2 (13.3 %)	15
Finland	11 (31.4 %)	1 (2.8 %)	16 (45.6 %)	7 (20 %)	35
Iceland	1 (10 %)	0 (0 %)	5 (50 %)	4 (40 %)	10
Norway	5 (31.2 %)	3 (18.8 %)	6 (37.5 %)	2 (12.5 %)	16
Sweden	5 (20.1 %)	2 (4.2 %)	15 (62.5 %)	2 (4.2 %)	24
Total Nordics	31 (31 %)	8 (8 %)	44 (44 %)	17 (17 %)	100

Figure 1 The Platforms model with axiology incorporated



Source, by authors, adapted from Jafari, 1990; Airey, 2008b; Barkathunnisha et al 2017; 2019