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SCIENCE AND PROFITS: problems and controversies for tourism fields

The goals of this commentary piece are twofold. On one hand it continues discussing the concerns originally formulated by Ulrike Gretzel in her text, *A vision for ERTR* recently published at e-Review of Tourism of Research. She claims the competition for research excellence exploded over the last decades. Today, tourism research is based on an uncanny obsession for citations and high-impact journal indexation. On another level, it questions the current usage of editorial copy right policies, which originally were designed to protect journals and authors from plagiarism, to the interests of great publishers that lead publications to restricted use.

Academic authors select publication outlets taking into account not only the visibility publications may have, an old criterion that prioritizes the net of potential readers, but also the number of citations. As Gretzel put it, one of the problems of the high ranking journals rests on the lack of accessibility for those institutions, or establishments which do not subscribe to the journal. At a closer look, this even defies one of the principles of science, which appeals to the need of access to the outcome of research. So, the discussion given in this terms is redeemed for editors to choose between prestige, status and free access for readers. Gretzel goes on to overtly say:

“So where does eRTR fit in? It is an open journal that is free and purely based on volunteer work with its contents and technical platform being owned and managed by Texas A&M University. It fulfils a training aspect as well, but with a broader agenda than other journals. First, it has an open policy for its editorial board with volunteers representing all levels of

research experience but certainly with a focus on recruiting reviewers early in their career. This of course means that there has to be an investment from the editorial team into training reviewers. Reviews are not blindly sent to authors but rather scrutinized by the editor and further interpreted for authors if needed". (Gretzel 2014: p. 60)

These points are in accordance with the criticism related to the advance of research in tourism fields. The problem of open access is being discussed in all disciplines, this is not an exclusive problem of tourism & hospitality. This commentary explores the effects of editorial policies on research as well as the conceptual limitation a focus on citations implies for the advance of science.

As Emile Durkheim (1956) put it, one of the characteristics of science consists in the lack of external constraints to determine its results. Not only does pressing investigators to present findings in higher-index journals have counter-productive effects, it also obscures the creativity of authors. It is unfortunate, as Gretzel explained; that the most prestigious journals are not open access. In parallel, the wages and incomes of researchers depend on their capacity to publish in top ranking journals. But beyond the veil of prestige, authors are deprived of any additional payment. Following Durkheim, this not only violates one of the tenets of science, but also means the authors are obliged to transfer their rights, and a paper can be replicated at the publisher's discretion. Of course, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that authors are not only alienated of their authorship, but are pressed to write always something new, while the publisher maintains the right to replicate the work indefinitely. As a result of this, the researchers are paid only by means of university salaries, which at the same time should pay to great publishers for accessing the publications they generated. It is unfortunate, indexations today regulates the market of knowledge production determining who dies and lives, the authoritative voices in certain disciplines and the peripheral boundaries.

Starting from this premise, the researcher will be better-paid depending on the ranking of the journal, ignoring other journals which do not fit with restrained policy. Thus, one might speculate that a new type of social Darwinism will be applied to tourism research. The concept of the survival of the fittest, anyway, sets the pace to a new more radical way of competition, where the success of fewer entails the ruins of the rest. It is clear how this Darwinist idea is associated with the h-index. How may we explain that the high-citation journals are not widely accessible to a broader audience?

The h-index involves an effort to measure the combination of productivity and impact. The latter is measured by the number of citations one author has. However, analysts have exerted a considerable criticism to ponder the value of an investigator in h-index alone. The reasons are many, but some are of paramount importance.

- The h-index balks the productivity of young authors who, if not widely known, have little possibilities to be cited.
- It does not contemplate the importance of work for a discipline. For example, Albert Einstein published only four papers in his life, this means that his h-index would be 4.
- According to the example discussed above, the most recognized and valorized scholars are not necessarily the most cited specialists.
- It does not acknowledge the context in which the work is cited. Perhaps it is harshly criticized.
- Each discipline, each culture, each language develops their own pace to citations. This cannot be homogenized.
- The index can be manipulated in many ways, for example by means of self-citations or tactical moves such as writing review papers.

In the tourism and hospitality fields, Gretzel's concerns found a clear validation in the condition today faced by the knowledge production in Argentina, an example I afford to

describe. In earlier studies, Korstanje has explained that in Argentina advances in tourism-related fields were based on a focus on business, which excluded social sciences. The curricula of tourism-led bachelors are strictly centered to the profits and incomes the industry may contribute as well as the policy-maker views. A whole portion of graduate students in tourism comes from privately-owned universities, totalizing more than 70% of graduations. Unfamiliar with the technique and methodologies of research, a great part of Tourism bachelors are introduced to the industry to work as tour-operators, or travel agents. Although CONICET (National Council of Scientific and Technical Research) does not recognize tourism as a formal alternative to research, a lot of researchers in this institution, coming from other disciplines, opt for tourism as the primary object of study (Korstanje 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011).

Locally, the CONICET invests its financial resources to support its researchers. Being CONICET funded exhibits a sign of great prestige and respect by other local investigators. Unlike the great industrial powers such as the US or England, the education in Argentina is in the hands of the State. The most prestigious universities are not private. CONICET not only monopolizes the agenda or curricula by means of other institutions, but also what and when the knowledge is produced. To some extent, their researchers are pressed to publish in the most highly-indexed journals such as *Tourism Management*, *Journal of Sustainable tourism*, *Tourism Geographies* and *Annals of Tourism Research*. Although the language seems to be an insurmountable barrier, some scholars had the luck to publish in English supported by other Anglo-peers or a copy-editor that makes the pertinent proof-read. However, once published the paper is restricted to be widely accessed by other Argentine citizens whose educational institutions are not subscribed to professional journals. At a first stage, the problem was fixed by paying the annual subscription for all state universities, excluding obviously the private sector. Over recent years, the CONICET authorities realized the

information they produced not only was locked, but also they had to pay for the same knowledge they produced. Without any result, CONICET ordered to create a repository in tourism and hospitality which conjoined to other disciplines, would show all proper high-quality publications. When I say without result I mean that only the 2% of participants (researchers and academicians) loaded their work to be exhibited in this repository. Many of them argued that because of copy-right issues they were unable to pass the ball to CONICET's repository platform. Thus, Argentinean researchers have not conferred copyright to "CONICET" and its repository as requested by the Government. So the project was a complete failure. Though they recognized the importance for other colleagues and citizens to read scientific works in a democratic way, paradoxically they retained their own productions to gain positions in the international ranking lists. A last desperate attempt by CONICET forced its satellite forces, CONEAU, another organization which evaluates the post-grad careers, to equal SCOPUS, ISI THOMPSON to other minor local indexes. Many privately-owned universities were encouraged to enroll their journals in local indexes such as Scielo. In their protocols and documents, authorities of CONICET finally gave the same value to Scielo. This triggers a hot debate around the political and economic nature of prestige, which surely is intertwined with specific and centralized forms of production. Undoubtedly, Gretzel's worries about the future of free research and publication in tourism for the next years are real. To what extent, I do not know. The possibilities of survival for a university-hosted publication are uncertain; but whatever the case may be, supporting a project like this deserves our time and attention.

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