

The future of tourism: interview with Bernadett Papp on bringing equity into debates on tourism development and destination governance

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This paper forms part of a special section "10th Anniversary of the *Journal of Tourism Futures*", guest edited by Dr Stefan Hartman, Prof. Albert Postma and Prof. Ian Yeoman.

Abstract

Purpose – As the *Journal of Tourism Futures* celebrates its 10th Anniversary, Dr Stefan Hartman (head of department at the European Tourism Futures Institute, NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences) interviews Bernadett Papp (senior researcher at the European Tourism Futures Institute (ETFI) at NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences) about her recent work in tourism practice and academic and future perspectives on topics relevant to the future of tourism.

Design/methodology/approach – A personal interview was held on September 16, 2024.

Findings – Bernadett Papp draws attention to the importance of bringing equity into debates on tourism development and destination governance. She sees a crucial role for governments, the redesign of institutional frameworks, monitoring and data collection and rethinking systems of governance.

Originality/value – The interview provides unique insights into the viewpoints of Papp, highlighting the importance of the still understudied topic of equitable tourism. A topic that still requires a lot of work before hitting mainstream approaches to destination development, even though it should have been on the policy agendas for many years already.

Keywords Future of tourism, Journal of tourism futures, Destination management, Equity, Equitable tourism, Tourism governance

Paper type Viewpoint

Stefan Hartman: Could you briefly introduce yourself and your current roles?

Bernadett Papp: Within NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences, I hold two positions. I'm involved with the European Tourism Futures Institute (ETFI) as a senior researcher and project leader. In this role, I work on various applied research projects in collaboration with partners from the industry. I am also involved in education at the Master of International Leisure, Tourism and Events Management (MILTEM) program. In this program I am responsible for a part of the curriculum. I am currently developing a new course focused on public management and will be piloting it this year. Additionally, I supervise master theses and I am a member of the curriculum committee.

Outside NHL Stenden, I hold two other positions. I am theme manager with the Centre of Expertise in Leisure, Tourism and Hospitality (CELTH), focusing on smartness, data collection, and analysis. Next to this position, I am a member of UN Tourism's QUEST advisory board. QUEST is a quality certification system for destinations. I have also completed several projects for them as an external consultant.

Stefan Hartman: *What research project is keeping you busy right now?*

Bernadett Papp: I am currently finishing a project that started last year, focusing on equity and the equitable distribution of benefits generated through tourism development within destinations. This is a collaboration between Dutch universities, NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences, Breda University of Applied Sciences, HZ University of Applied Sciences, CELTH, and several partners from the sector, such as The Travel Foundation, Destination Think and the Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions (NBTC).

The report is near completion and will be published at the end of September or early October 2024. We explored 25 case studies that showcase practices or attempts at better distributing benefits in a more just and fair way. We identified around 40 different mechanisms that destination management organizations or national tourism organizations can use. These mechanisms are not entirely new, but we aim to raise awareness about how they can be used to develop tourism more equitably.

We explored the challenges related to using these mechanisms, their success factors, and the kind of equitable outcomes they can deliver. We identified around 25 equitable outcomes that tourism development can bring to destination communities. We link these mechanisms to these outcomes, hoping to raise awareness that destinations need to shift towards an Equity-Driven Management approach. This approach starts with broader societal goals that are high on the destination's agenda and looks at how tourism can contribute to these goals.

Stefan Hartman: *The project sounds ambitious, advocating for a system change. Do you think it can be implemented?*

Bernadett Papp: Yes, we do advocate for system change and believe it is needed. However, we also understand the complexity. We believe that starting small is probably the way forward. In the report, we introduce different interventions, mechanisms, and programs that can be the first step. By building on these, tourism destinations can start to shift towards an equity-driven approach.

Currently, data and information for measuring equitable outcomes, even at program levels, are missing. Some interventions can already be evidence-based, with monitoring programs and data available, while others are less so or yet to be measured. We think it will take time to change systems and the way we plan for the development of tourism destinations. Starting small and building an evidence base by implementing and measuring the impact of these mechanisms is the way forward.

Q4: *What are the follow-up plans for this project?*

Bernadett Papp: In a follow-up project, we plan to work on a diagnostics framework that can help destinations better understand how benefits are distributed. We want to provide tools to measure the distribution of benefits, key performance indicators (KPIs) that they can monitor, and methodologies for data collection and analysis.

Equity-Driven Management is based on informed decisions, evidence, and a better understanding of destination communities and their needs and goals. This involves community profiling to understand who the different segments of society are. Often, communities are referred to as a homogeneous group, but they are not!

We want to provide ways to better understand who the communities actually are and then find ways to understand how benefits are currently distributed, what data is available, and where destinations can gather data if it is missing. We aim to help them build the capacity to work with the data and use it for strategic decision-making.

Stefan Hartman: *Are there other topics you think need to be addressed that are currently overlooked?*

Bernadett Papp: Yes, and these are closely linked to equity, fairness, and justice. These topics are crucial if we want to develop the tourism sector sustainably in the long term and better understand the impact on destination communities.

For instance, in cities, which are complex multi-user, multi-functional areas, we have seen anti-tourism movements and social activism in response to the high social costs of growth-driven policies aimed at boosting tourism development. The benefits of tourism often accumulate in the hands of a few players or certain areas, leading to issues such as gentrification, displacement and exclusion of residents from their neighborhoods. The negative narrative around tourism is partly because of this imbalance, as the benefits tend to go to a small group of individuals whereas the burdens of tourism tend to fall on a wider part of society.

We need to examine the role of governments in this, as their role should be evolving to address the current challenges. This is also linked to my PhD research, which looks at how the institutional and governance frameworks within urban destinations could be revised to respond to these challenges.

Many cities have gone through complex urban development trajectories over the past 20–30 years, with tourism always playing an important role. Many cities followed a growth-oriented policy and built governance structures around it. While cities and tourism have evolved, governance structures have not or minimally, which is why we need to take a critical look at these constructs and the place of tourism within them.

Stefan Hartman: *How do academic publications help in your work?*

Bernadett Papp: For me, applied research is exciting because it combines real-life problems with science. An applied research project starts with a real-life problem that destination stakeholders face, and then continues with scientific knowledge on what is known about the problem such as theories, frameworks, and approaches.

You then go back to the destination to see what is applicable from that knowledge and possibly collect additional information through primary research. In turn, this informs or refines existing knowledge or develops new approaches. It is a constant back-and-forth between real-life problems and academic knowledge. The last step is always going back to academia and theorizing the applied knowledge that came out of the project, which often results in publishing scientific articles based on industry reports.

Stefan Hartman: *If you were to plan the next special issue for the Journal of Tourism Futures, what topics would you like to see?*

Bernadett Papp: I truly believe that the main topics we need to focus on are equity, better policies, and understanding the needs of destination communities. If we continue developing destinations and tourism the way we do now, the sector risks losing its social license to operate.

We need better policies, especially public policy, and an understanding of how tourism can contribute to broader societal goals. Tourism has often been managed in silos, but it needs to be integrated into different policy domains. However, this raises the question of whether tourism should remain a distinct policy domain or be integrated into other areas.

Currently, tourism is often still an inferior policy domain, even in destinations such as Barcelona, that has complex governance frameworks. Tourism planning professionals often lack a mandate and tend to find themselves on the sidelines. We need to find the right place and form for tourism within wider governance structures. Whether this approach should be rigid or fluid is still to be determined.

Stefan Hartman: *Talking about integrating tourism into other policy domains, is there is still a relevance for tourism-focused research and publications in the future?*

Bernadett Papp: Yes, there is. The knowledge required for understanding and managing tourism is specialized. However, I believe in an interdisciplinary approach. In the future, we will need more attention on interdisciplinary research to understand tourism and its interconnections with other fields.

For future professionals, whether in tourism practice or academia, we need to educate them not only in tourism but also in other relevant fields, such as urban studies and political science. This

interdisciplinary knowledge is crucial, as tourism professionals often lack in-depth knowledge in areas such as public policy-making.

There will be a need for professionals and academics who can bring an interdisciplinary, holistic understanding to tourism. The *Journal of Tourism Futures* has a role in facilitating this understanding and in addressing the evolving landscape of tourism research.

Further reading

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