



# A tale of four futures: Tourism academia and COVID-19

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## Abstract

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented “super-shock” for the tourism industry. How tourism academia relates to this unpredictable context is anyhow not yet evident. This study uses a qualitative scenario method to propose four possible futures for tourism academia considering the pandemic and to draw attention to key factors of these future developments. Nine interviews were held with tourism (full/ordinary) professors across Europe, America, Asia, and the Pacific Region to gain expert insights. As a result, four scenarios are proposed for tourism education, industry collaboration, research, and discipline identity. *Recovery* (“new sustainability” or “revenge-tourism”) for tourism academia if the pandemic impact is short-term, and *Adaptancy* (“bridging the gap” or “decline”) for tourism academia if the COVID-19 impact is long-lasting. Key factors for the way forward are finally discussed and contributions of our findings are highlighted.

## Keywords

COVID-19; tourism academia; revenge-tourism; scenario; COVID-washing

## 1. Introduction

Although the precise beginning of “tourism academia” is difficult to trace, it is generally assumed that related research has undergone more than 40 years (Airey, 2015). Butler (2015)

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pointed out that it is a common misperception that the subject is of recent origin and just materialised after the advent of mass tourism, while contemporary travel has many common features with tourism even two millennia ago. Travel literature itself indeed has a millennial history with early evidence of travel writing by Ancient Greeks and Romans.

By most defined as a multi-disciplinary field rather than as a discipline, interest in tourism academia has had steady growth, and numbers of journals have increased significantly. However, the field has long been criticized for the limited capacity to solve real-world problems (Buckley, 2012; Butler, 2015; Walters, Burns & Stettler, 2015) and for a subordinate role in interdisciplinary collaborations (Okumus, van Niekerk, Koseoglu & Bilgihan, 2018; McKercher & Prideaux, 2014).

Contemporary tourism academia finds its roots in early descriptive and rather advocative studies of the tourism phenomenon (Butler, 2015; Jafari, 1990/2001/2007), while a more cautionary and critical turn was initiated partly by intense theory development in the 1970s; largely as a response to real-world and/or industry issues. Regarding contemporary tourism academia, a complex picture of a globally expanding multi-disciplinary field emerges; arguably in a sort of identity crisis and with low (perceived) relevance for the industry and other scientific fields.

The delicate role of tourism academia has been intensified by the outbreak of COVID-19 due to its adverse impact on the tourism and hospitality industries (UNWTO, 2020a), which have suffered a so-called “super-shock” (Dolcinar & Zare, 2020), as the outbreak had crippled the global tourism industry with borders being closed, bans on visas for certain nationalities and airports converted into parking lots (Abdullah, 2020; Scott, 2020). The World Travel and Tourism Council (2020) stated that the pandemic could affect up to 50 million jobs in the tourism industry worldwide, with Asia being likely the most affected continent and an expected 10 month or longer recovery time after COVID-19 eventually comes to an end.

Tourism academia is now facing an ambiguous situation, in which the phenomenon of reference (i.e. tourism) is suffering in an unprecedented manner in modern history. Some scholars have highlighted that it will be paramount for tourism academia to assist with research efforts during the crisis (Zenker & Kock, 2020), while discussions on academic networks (e.g. TRINET) have often raised a more general “*quo vadis*” for the field. Higgins-Desbiolles (2020a) shows in her recent article that there is a related tension between industry

advocates and proponents of sustainability, resulting in a pandemic struggle within tourism academia.

Considering these difficult circumstances, it is vital for tourism academics to envision the future for their field and to identify potential related issues and opportunities. Yeoman (2020) stated literally that tourism post-pandemic is a “blank piece of paper”. To fulfill those gaps, the aim of this study is to propose possible ways forward for tourism academia in light of COVID-19, including the paths of development leading to these scenarios. These scenarios developed are not intended to represent a full description of the future, but rather to highlight central elements of a possible future and to draw attention to key factors of these future developments (Kosow & Gaßner, 2008, p. 1). This study adopts a qualitative stance to develop future possible scenarios, interviewing experienced (full/ordinary) professors within the tourism field.

The importance and contribution of this study are thus manifold. Through the proposed scenarios, several key factors for tourism academia’s way forward throughout and potentially after the pandemic are investigated. These will give key points of thought for other scholars to potentially identify opportunities, but also avoid possible harmful pitfalls for the field. In addition to this, other complex features influenced by the pandemic will be discussed, among which tourism education and the often discussed relationship between academics and the industry. Finally, possible futures and implications are discussed for this purpose.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Tourism Academia - Genealogy and State-of-art**

While most tourism research in the modern sense starts with the advent of mass tourism, Butler (2015) states that travel literature and guidebooks have existed for millennia. There are two predominant frameworks for tracing a somewhat linear genealogy of modern tourism academia, namely Jafari’s (1990/2001/2007) “platforms of tourism research” and Butler’s (2015) “eras of tourism research”. While the authors are certainly aware of each other’s work (Butler, p.21 refers to the platforms as potentially containing “*creators’ opinions and biases*”, while acknowledging the same for himself), Jafari emphasizes orientation and ideology, and Butler on content and focus.

Xiao (2013, p. 2) describes Jafari's platforms as a "holistic view on the evolution of tourism through sequential and at times concurrent positions". The first platform proposed is advocacy, where tourism was presented as an economic strategy to provide income and employment, i.e. seen in a predominantly positive light. The second platform is cautionary, where tourism impacts became evident, particularly concerning society and the environment. The third is adaptancy, where alternative forms of tourism were proposed to maintain the economic benefits without (or limiting) the negative impacts. Finally, Jafari proposes a knowledge-based platform, where scientific perspectives for researchers and academics are encouraged to overcome the limitations of the previous platforms. Macbeth (2005) states that sustainability can be added as a fifth platform, as this was a predominant focus of tourism academia in the 1990s. Moscardo and Murphy (2014) highlight that the platforms emerged sequentially, but they concurrently coexist and interplay in contemporary tourism academia.

Butler (2015, p.21) describes the eras of tourism academia as ranging from "factual to fallacious". Accordingly, tourism academia originated in factual research, dealing with "real world and occurrences and patterns therein, mostly in a descriptive style." Most of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century factual tourism research dealt with either use of land or the economic effects of tourism (Butler, 2015). Next, there is the early theoretical era, where the first models and theories in tourism were introduced. Butler highlights that this was predominant in the 1960s and was mostly focussed on either travel (and demand) or carrying capacity; however, he points out that this work is usually ignored by tourism academics as it was branded as "leisure" rather than as tourism. Subsequently, Butler describes the 1970s as an "era of theoretical explosion", where most of the prevalent models of tourism still in use today were developed. According to Butler (2015), the focus of this era was on real rather than conceptual issues, particularly focused on tourists, hosts, and the effect on the development of destinations. Finally, he looks at the contemporary era of tourism and points out related fallacies; most notably inadequate borrowing of ideas and theories from other disciplines; easy acceptance of outside theory rather than intradisciplinary theory development; negligence of the environmental aspects of tourism; ignoring research on current problems, and proposes a shift towards a more factual approach. Finally, Butler (2015) points to the positive note of tourism academia developing in diverse areas of the world, most notably in China.

Several scholars have focused on the contemporary nature of the tourism field, mostly on related issues and academic fallacies. McKercher and Prideaux (2014) identified six types of

myths in tourism: self-interest, which contends the nature of tourism as a field or discipline, and its relationship to (presumably) the world's largest industry; negative foundations myths, with many early papers portraying tourism predominantly in a negative light; reactive positive stakeholder myths describing value-laden positive myths on the benefits of tourism, countering the aforementioned negative myths; inherited myths, where theories from other disciplines entered the field without questioning; convergent ideological myths, often value-laden myths which glorify concepts such as alternative tourism, while opposing phenomena like mass tourism; and too good not to be true, where positives are overhyped and the negatives are ignored. It is suggested that scholars, particularly the early career researchers, should constantly and reflexively engage with the ethical questions that relate to their own identity, power, and responsibility as academics (Khoo-Lattimore, 2018a). Other scholars have added that tourism academia considers issues such as feminism and gender equality as peripheral (Munar, Khoo-Lattimore, Chambers, & Biran, 2017).

Further studies have focused on trends in the field through investigating publications in leading journals, such as Xiao and Smith (2006) and Ballantyne, Packer, and Axelsen (2009). Key findings show patterns, such as increasing importance given to tourists and tourist experiences, the decline of economic and hospitality studies, a rise of marketing and management topics, and gradual erosion of North American dominance in the field with a shift towards the Asian-Pacific region. Particularly to this, Huang and Chen (2016) highlight that with an increase in publications from Chinese scholars, quantitative methods and a (post)positivist paradigm-shift are evident in the field. Khoo-Lattimore (2018b) emphasises that tourism research landscape is ever changing. It is necessary to reflect on past and current research trends and to project scholars' reflections into the future. Finally, other scholars have pointed out that tourism academia often fragments into tribes, territories, and networks (Ren, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010; Tribe, 2010), with a divide between management and socio-cultural scholars. How the field will progress beyond this would anyhow need the development of different potential scenarios.

Looking into future scenarios of tourism is not new. Scholars have engaged in scenario building in tourism, with a specially dedicated journal – “Journal of Tourism Futures”. Tourism futurists have indeed correctly elaborated qualitative and quantitative scenarios predicting future trends, such as China's growth as a tourist destination (e.g. Yeoman, 2009), the growing need for sustainability (Postma, Cavagnaro, & Spruyt, 2017), a rapid rise in tourist numbers on a global scale (Yeoman, 2012), growing diversification in the family

tourist market (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015) and growth in city tourism (Postma, Buda, Gugerell, 2017). To correctly hypothesize future developments, one must first investigate past related theories and the current situation.

## 2.2. Tourism and COVID-19

Hall (2010) pointed out that tourism literature often equals crisis with or pays specific attention to economic and financial disasters. Comparatively, little attention is paid to other types of crises, such as terrorism, political and environmental disasters. This is in part also true for epidemics and pandemics. Although there is no precedent of COVID-19 concerning modern tourism, some inferences can be made by looking at the four pandemics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020), namely SARS (2002) “Bird flu” (2009), MERS (2012), and the Ebola-outbreaks of the last decade. SARS, for example, did not have major effects on the Hong Kong economy but hit tourism significantly (Siu & Wong, 2004). The swine flu pandemic affected certain destinations only, with Mexico losing approximately 1 million overseas’ visitors (Russy & Smith, 2013). MERS, although originating in the Middle East, had widespread impacts on tourism, with even South Korea reporting an estimated loss of 2.1 million international visitors (Joo, Maskery, Berro, Rotz, Lee, & Brown, 2019). Ebola, on the other hand, is believed to have damaged the brand image of several African destinations in a long term (Novelli, Burgess, Jones, & Ritchie, 2018).

To contextualize the crisis, Gössling et al. (2020) drew on these previous epidemics/pandemics and other types of global crises to investigate how COVID-19 may impact society, the economy, and ultimately, tourism. Drawing on the case of SARS, MERS, and the global economic crisis (2008/09), they showed that tourism as an industry was relatively resilient to external shocks, but hypothesize that the impact of COVID-19 on the industry will be severe. This believed to be related to particular contextual factors of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such as a growth in the world population; mobility; urbanization; industrialized food production in global value chains; increased consumption of higher-order food; and the development of a global transport network (Pongsiri et al., 2009; Labonte et al., 2011). At the time of writing, significant impacts on the tourism industry are already evident. The global outbreak of COVID-19 has brought the world to a standstill. Tourism has been the worst affected of all major economic sectors due to the resulting travel restrictions as well as a slump in demand among travelers (UNWTO, 2020a). There is a rapidly developing body of COVID-19 research in tourism that has brought forward major research themes. Impacts in

economic, social-cultural, and environmental aspects were reported during the pandemic and were argued to affect the tourism industry in both the short-term and long-term.

In terms of economic impact, the tourism industry is experiencing a severe coronavirus-induced economic crisis, and this has been reported throughout the whole tourism ecosystem. It is estimated that global international tourist arrivals might decrease by 20–30% in 2020, leading to a potential loss of US\$30–50 billion (UNWTO, 2020b). In many of the world's cities, planned travel went down by 80–90% (BBC, 2020a). Undeniably, the hospitality and tourism sectors are vulnerable to the increasing occurrence and severity of disasters, which often lead to significant economic losses (Hall, 2010). Dolnicar and Zare (2020) argued that COVID-19 represents an economic super-shock, meaning “any change to fundamental macroeconomic variables or relationships that has a substantial effect on macroeconomic outcomes and measures of economic performance, such as unemployment, consumption, and inflation” (Investopedia, 2020). The COVID-19-induced shock is thus to be considered worldwide and brings dramatic and structural changes in different sectors (Dolnicar & Zare, 2020).

Subsequently, almost every sector of tourism has been affected by this pandemic. For instance, given the demands for social distancing policies in most countries, the restaurant industry is one of the worst affected (Cössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). In the accommodation sector, COVID-19-induced travel restrictions led to a 96% drop in Airbnb bookings (DuBois, 2020). It is predicted that a 50% hotel revenue decline will occur for the entirety of 2020 (Oxford Economics, 2020). Eight in 10 hotel rooms are empty (STR, 2020) and 70 percent of hotel employees laid off or furloughed (American Hotel & Lodging Association, 2020). Airlines were also heavily hit, and this had heavy negative impacts on employees and dependent activities. The International Civil Aviation Organization (2020) predicted that the fall in scheduled international passenger traffic during 2020 will result in a decline of between 44% to 80% of international passengers (International Civil Aviation Organisation, 2020). Airports Council International indicated that the crisis will result in a reduction of 4.6 billion passengers in 2020 and a global loss of USD 97 billion (Airports Council International, 2020). Scholars have focused on the economic impacts of the pandemic on the tourism industry (e.g. Newsome, 2020; Sigala, 2020; Williams, 2020), specifically on crisis management and/or resilience (e.g. Prayag, 2020; Yeh, 2020).

COVID-19 also has social-cultural impacts, including political impacts. Facing this global pandemic, different countries, according to their own social system and resources, carried out different strategies to cope. More than 9 out of 10 people in the world live in countries that have put in place cross-border travel restrictions (Connor, 2020). However, social distancing and isolation measures have significant impacts on people's mental health and wellbeings, such as heightening feelings of anxiety and depression, development of a social anxiety disorder, and strong feelings of loss (Williams, Armitage, Tampe, & Dienes, 2020). Furthermore, racial discriminations and violence were reported in destinations upon tourists from countries where COVID-19 broke out at an early stage (International Travel and Health Insurance Journal, 2020; Wassler & Talarico, 2021).

The pandemic is also likely to change tourists' lifestyles, travel behaviors, and patterns. Wen et al. (2020) argued that the outbreak of COVID-19 will affect Chinese travelers' travel patterns, through the increasing popularity of independent or small group travel, luxury trips, and health and wellness tourism. New forms of tourism such as slow tourism and smart tourism are also expected to lead future tourism activities. These changes deviate from the traditional Chinese collectivist culture and socialist social structure. Baum and Nguyen (2020) stated that human's rights to participate in hospitality and tourism have been haunted by COVID-19 through actions including borders closings, curtailment of travel, closure of attractions and tourism facilities, rescinding of consumer protection rights in hospitality and tourism, the reaction against second home and campervan owners, return to the mothership, confinement to a place of residence and penalties for non-compliance, restrictions on rights to visit friends and family, confinement in tourism locations, and abuse of minorities through boycotting their businesses. When trying to restart the tourism industry after COVID-19, responsible tourism approaches have been advocated to address the negative social impacts of tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). Sociocultural impacts have been highlighted in residents (Qiu, Park, Lee, & Song, 2020), although a focus on tourist behavior has been more evident (e.g. Kock, Nørfelt, Josiassen, Assaf, & Tsionas, 2020; Li, Zhang, Liu, Kozak, & Wen; 2020). Moreover, with the advent of several vaccines in late 2020, a recent study by Williams, Wassler, and Ferdinand (2020) called for a further research stream into social-media-related misinformation about the pandemic and upcoming issues with vaccine hesitancy.

Environmental impacts are also increasingly evident. Though the COVID-19 affects the economy and humans' social-cultural wellbeing negatively, it likely brings positive, at least in the short-term, environmental effects to destinations. Cleaner air, increasing urban wildlife,

and a dramatic shift to a less carbon-intensive lifestyle show the possibility of what can be achieved in days (Guardian, 2020). Pollution and greenhouse gas emissions have dropped across continents as countries try to contain the spread of the coronavirus. For instance, in China, emissions declined by 25% at the beginning of the year as people were instructed to stay at home. Factories shut and coal use dropped by 40%. The percentage of days with good quality air was up by 11.4% compared with the same time last year in 337 cities across China. In Europe, satellite images show nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) emissions fading away over northern Italy and a similar situation was found in Spain and the UK (BBC, 2020b). COVID-19 and sustainability have been a major topic of academic interest, whereas scholars highlighted the need for a higher focus on sustainability moving forwards (e.g. Calvani, Lew, & Perez, 2020; Gretzel et al., 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020a,b; Newsome, 2020). It is argued if this environmental change is just a fleeting shift or could it lead to longer-lasting falls in emissions with efforts from different stakeholders, including those relating to tourism development (Guardian, 2020). Such environmental change urged for a transformation initiated by COVID-19, to be adopted by destinations regarding how to respond to climate change and a carbon-neutral economy. These strategies feature what a future carbon-neutral economic production system might look like, and the tourism industry could have plentiful opportunities to transform from the current high-resource consumption model to one that is environmentally friendly and resource neutral (Prideaux, Thompson & Pabel, 2020).

It is thus evident that the heavy and already evident impacts of the pandemic are disrupting the tourism industry and that economic, socio-cultural, political, and environmental impacts are key factors likely to influence academia too. How tourism academia will react to the long-term impacts of the pandemic and what the future holds for the field is anyhow not yet evident. This research will use a scenario method to propose possible ways forward for tourism academia considering COVID-19, including the paths of development leading to these scenarios. The applied qualitative scenario method will be discussed next.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Method**

“Scenario” is a fuzzy concept that has often been misused and misunderstood (Bishop, Hines, & Collins, 2007; Mietzner & Reger, 2004). A wide range of scenario techniques has been developed, based on both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. Although on a first

glance there are few commonalities, Kosow and Gaßner (2008) point out some key characteristics of scenarios, namely (1) scenarios are not a comprehensive image of the future, but rather hypothetical sequences of events constructed for focusing on causal processes and decision points; (2) scenarios are based on certain identified key factors and thus do not represent the future as a whole, but rather a possible future construct of key factors; and (3) scenarios, unlike prognoses, do not offer “true” knowledge of the future, but rather construct a possible future based on gained knowledge of the past and present. As this study aimed at investigating possible futures for tourism academia after COVID-19, a qualitative scenario method was thus deemed as appropriate.

Kosow and Gaßner (2008) subdivided scenarios based on their chronological horizons into short-term (up to 10 years), medium-term (up to 25 years), and long-term (more than 25 years). With the first vaccines being administered and their time of immunization still unclear, predictions on when the pandemic will (officially) end are still vague. Additional factors, such as leadership, innovations, and political decisions are also likely to influence the duration of the crisis (Guest, del Rio, & Sanchez, 2020). However, this study does not define the “end” of the pandemic as the eventual complete eradication of the disease, but rather as an official announcement by the authorities which concludes a phase of a global pandemic. This will not exclude the long-term impacts of the pandemic which go beyond the official timeframe. It is assumed that the official end of the pandemic is likely in less than 10 years, and thus scenario planning - even for impacts stretching beyond the potential end date - is based on a short-term horizon for this study.

Some key steps are ideally followed when employing qualitative short-term scenario techniques (see Burmeister, Neef, & Beyers, 2004; Gausemeier, Fink, & Schlake, 1996; Phelps, Chan, & Kapsalis, 2001). Data analysis of this research has followed the following steps. Phase 1 refers to the identification of the scenario field or the question to what purpose a scenario is developed. In this context, a “system scenario” was chosen, taking a certain internal arena (tourism academia) and external factors (COVID-19) into account. This resulted in the research goal stated previously.

Phase 2 refers to the identification of key factors, or central factors that will have an impact on the field itself. In this case, initial factors which through the advent of COVID-19 likely influence tourism academia were identified from the literature and verified in the interviews

(environmental, economic, political, socio-cultural) and additional factors emerged from the interviews (technical, temporal).

Phase 3 refers to the analysis of key factors, or how these key factors are likely to affect academia. This was predominantly achieved through the interviews and transcripts. The six factors were found to have four main effects on tourism academia, namely on education, industry relationships, research, and discipline identity. Phase 4 refers to scenario generation, where factors and effects are brought together, worked up, and bundled into scenarios.

Henrichs (2003) highlights that the number of scenarios should be based on the number that is required to cover an adequate number of perspectives and possible futures, but as few as possible, to avoid fatigue and to ensure that the process remains manageable. Based on our data four scenarios were proposed and will be discussed in the relevant sections.

### 3.2. Sampling and Data Collection

In terms of sampling, a purposive, experience-based design was chosen. As knowledge of the past and present is a key factor in proposing future scenarios, experts on the matter of tourism academia were selected as key participants of the study. To gain as much insight as possible, these experts were specified as full (ordinary) professors operating within the tourism field. This is to ensure that our respondents have a solid knowledge of the academic field of tourism in several aspects, including faculty (and administrative) duties, (post)graduate student supervision, potential curriculum development, familiarity with academic platforms such as TriNet, the possibility to have participated in round table discussion with other academics etc. The purposive sampling design based on the academic position was diversified by taking other demographic factors of the respondents into account, namely gender, geographical distribution, and area of expertise within the tourism field. The purposive sampling design was initially combined with convenience sampling and later with a snowball approach. All interviews were held on Skype during the pandemic (May 2020 – June 2020).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews which allow higher flexibility and more inductive reasoning as respondents were asked to provide answers with fewer restrictions (Egger, Lei, & Wassler, 2020). Questions were developed based on Kosow and Gaßner's (2008) suggestion to move from descriptive to normative questions in qualitative scenario planning. The focus of these was not based only on how the crisis was perceived, but also on the resilience of the field in responding to the pandemic (Prayag, 2017). The interview guide was presented in Appendix 1.

The initial interview guide started this off with a descriptive “what do we know” related to tourism academia (example questions: “how would you describe contemporary tourism academia?”; “are there any issues you see with contemporary tourism academia) and its relationship with COVID-19 (example questions: “What do you think are the most popular areas of research now?”; “what do tourism academics focus on now?”).

Second, the interview guide moved to a normative “where do we want to go” in terms of COVID-19 related key factors, which will influence the way forward for tourism academia (example questions: “what are the key factors to consider for tourism academia to move forward from now on?”; “where should our focus be?”) and potential ways forward for tourism academia if COVID-19 will be either a short term or a long term problem (example questions: “how do you see tourism academia if COVID-19 will stretch beyond 2021?”; “how do you think tourism academics will react on in a long term?”).

Throughout the interview phase, modifications to the interview guide and spontaneous follow-up questions were employed if new information arose, given the exploratory nature of this study. Depending on the area of expertise of the interviewees, the focus was also slightly shifted on different aspects of tourism academia (e.g. education, research, industry collaboration). Table 1 shows the profile of the participants.

Overall, a total of nine interviews were held, ranging from 30 to 87 minutes. Among the nine interviewees, three were female and six were male, coming from the UK, USA, Pacific Islands, Mainland China and Hong Kong SAR. Their research expertise covered a broad range of topics in tourism, including tourism consumer behaviour, product development, tourism marketing, tourism economics, sustainability, tourism planning, social practice, transportation, anthropology and human resources. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

All transcribed data were coded based on emerging themes in the qualitative analysis software QDA Miner. Following the previously outlined steps in the scenario method, the preliminary coding process identified different factors that either emerged or were confirmed in the interviews. Within these factors, the potential effects of these factors on COVID-19 were created as a subcode. In a second stage, the coded data was funneled into possible futures

through a discussion and brainstorming session of the researchers and 4 scenarios emerged based on different predictions, namely recovery (the pandemic will end completely in 2021) and adaptation (the pandemic will continue for longer than 2021). The given end year here referred to the authorities declaring that the pandemic as such has ended, and did not imply the duration of either short or long-term impacts. Although this cut-off date is approximate and not precise, our respondents suggested that this might be a turning point in how the industry will react and adapt.

To heighten the trustworthiness of the data, findings were verified by two researchers separately, which in qualitative studies aids truth value, consistency, and neutrality of the research method (Noble & Smith, 2015). The findings are offered in the upcoming section. On request of some of the participants, quotes are not directly attributed to the respondents, as these might be easily identified from their location of employment and subject area within the tourism field.

## **4. Findings and Discussion**

### **4.1. Identification and Analysis of Key Factors**

Several key factors of impact resulting from COVID-19 on the tourism industry were identified in the previously discussed literature (environmental, economic, political, socio-cultural) and these were confirmed by the interviewee respondents to also likely impact tourism academia. Furthermore, technical and temporal factors emerged to be key.

Environmental factors were described as being related to less use of public transport, fewer flights, less business travel, and more local or car tourism; Economic factors were highlighted as a general financial crisis, suspension of the tourism industry, a crash of the job market and a decrease of funding for universities; Political factors as closed borders, diplomatic issues, safety regulations and lockdowns; Technical factors as an online shift in education, tracking apps, use for meeting software and home-working; Socio-cultural factors as heavier impacts for minority groups, elderly and poor people, inequality of the use of public resources, racism, and social trust issues; and Temporal factors were slow versus fast recovery process.

Temporal recovery is vital in determining the influence of the other factors, as a fast recovery of tourism (the pandemic completely ending within 2021) would see lesser impacts than a necessary adaptancy of tourism (the pandemic extending beyond 2021).

Respondents highlighted that these combined factors are likely to affect four main areas of tourism academia, namely its *education, industry relationships, research, and discipline identity*. It was furthermore concluded that temporal factors will determine in a major way how far tourism academia is affected, with a focus on a fast recovery from COVID-19 versus a slower recovery with the pandemic lasting beyond the upcoming year. Four scenarios have been accordingly developed on different timelines (two based on recovery and two based on adaptancy) and are presented as follows.

## 4.2. Scenario Generation

To generate scenarios, factors, and effects were brought together, worked up, and bundled. There is among the respondents a general agreement that COVID-19 is a disruptive force for tourism academia. One participant mentioned that *“I feel quite bad that tourism has been so badly disrupted. It’s like somebody is damaging your child. That’s an exaggeration, but it feels very real... COVID’s probably accelerated it [change] because it’s forcing us [academics] to think quite carefully about this thing that we all say and value”*. The scenarios presented are thus based on the assumption that the pandemic will cause changes in tourism academia. If the recovery scenario materializes, the “New Sustainability” and/or “Revenge Tourism” scenarios will recall previous conceptualizations of tourism and academia will be subdivided into “tribes” of management and socio-culturally oriented scholars (Ren et al., 2010; Tribe, 2010). If the adaptancy scenario should become a reality, the relationship between tourism academia and the industry will be a focal point (Buckley, 2012; Butler, 2015; McKercher & Prideaux, 2014; Walters et al., 2015), eventually determining the long-term fate of the field. The four scenarios are presented as follows (see Table 2).

### 4.2.1. Recovery: Tourism Academia and a New Sustainability

The first scenario assumes a relatively fast recovery, meaning that the pandemic ends within 2021 and is based on a New Sustainability paradigm in tourism academia. A participant mentioned that this would put the primary focus of tourism academia on *“rebuilding in a way that is more sustainable, has less carbon footprint, more social equity, and is more beneficial.”* Another said that *“I wonder if it’s going to be more about sustainability beyond environmental sustainability. For example, around work and precarious workers, and the*

*lack of protection for a lot of people.... I wonder if you might call back some of that empty tourism growth that we've been starting to see the "benefits" of.*" A third, *"some people realized that we need a different planet going forward when we restart. It will not be a start from the point we were, we need a substantial change."* In this scenario, we can thus assume a lasting impact of the pandemic on how tourism academia operates.

In terms of education, this will first and foremost underline the continued use of online learning tools to minimize travel for students and staff. Not only this, but further investment will be made in making in-class teaching more sustainable. According to one of our interviewees, British universities already have a sustainability management plan, but in terms of education, this will gain more importance through the development of *"new buildings, generating electricity and so on"* as the crisis has shown this necessity. This will also strengthen university investment in *"renewable energy"* and *"attracting local students"*. In terms of curriculum, this will enhance a teaching focus on issues such as climate change, social equity, and the potential issue that *"tourism is not beneficial for all types of places."* One of the interviewees, who functions as the head of a tourism school, also told us that curriculum changes in this scenario will likely include a focus on *"biohazards"*, *"health issues"*, and *"sustainable tourism"*.

In this scenario, tourism academia will primarily assist the industry in a sustainable restart and reconceptualization of tourism activities, products, and services. One participant mentioned that these trends are already evident in the industry, as even *"BBC had a news article on it a few couples of days ago, actually saying that the recovery strategy would be linked to a low carbon recovery"* and that industry people are complaining about the increasingly unsustainable behavior of tourists to which there is no solution. Business travel was mentioned as a particularly critical point, which due to the continuous adoption of pandemic-popularized technology is likely to take a heavy hit or change completely: *"business travel is one of the areas that's going to be significantly hit because one of the things that we've learned through this crisis is that we can do business in different ways. I think there's going to be a significant shift in business practices."* This is likely an important factor, particularly for MICE destinations, and reconceptualizing and mitigating the impacts of this shift is a potential priority. A participant summed up the industry and government relations in this scenario as *"The industry and governments, not just this country, but all over the world are going to be looking for some kind of roadmap, some kind of what can we do here and how can we do this? I think this is where we could be making a real difference as academics. Signaling*

*we don't go back to the old normal, we need to go forward differently and there are ways to do this now. Potentially ways to do this, and there are mechanisms to do this”.*

In research, this scenario will prioritize a new wave of sustainability research in economic, environmental, and socio-cultural terms; likely moving away from heightened advocacy of tourism towards a more critical stance, such as questions on “*whether tourism is even appropriate in some places*”. How to create a more beneficial type of tourism, particularly for the communities in developing countries, will be another likely issue of investigation. “*Sustainable business operations*” and “*Low carbon operations*” and the “*Informal labor sector*” were mentioned by another interviewee as research topics. Also, a new wave of critical research on the aviation industry and business travel will fit the sustainable recovery agenda. As such, the sustainable recovery scenario implies rebuilding the tourism industry more sustainably and fairly and helping governments in policy developments. This could also be done through a focus on crisis management for future situations, looking at “*different type of crisis affecting the tourism industry. I think that's what our team is doing, doing a lot of research and reviewing what's going on historically. Then from there, we are trying to find some directions and some kind of preventive measures.*” Another participant focused on the potential to limit the carbon footprint through a heightened focus on virtual reality and related consumer behaviors and experiences. Research questions are thus likely to change to “*Can I choose different ways?*”, for example, “*Staycations*” or “*Do I have to go to those attractions, or can I see them online?*” This was although put in the context of tourism research previously assuming that AI was “*a miracle, a cure-all.*” According to a respondent, we know to see that “*AI and smart tourism are not as good and as powerful as we were thinking*” [before the pandemic]” and this will influence future research in this scenario. Finally, one participant mentioned that the journals will be affected by this trend, particularly in terms of limited paper copies: “*they [journals] are printing less and less. Then in terms of publishing, I think the volume will be still there. I don't think there will be much hard copy printing.*”

Last, in this scenario, the discipline identity of tourism academia will switch to a more interdisciplinary agenda; with a focus on social sciences, the humanities, and more sustainability-focused fields, such as environmental sciences. This was mentioned not to be an alteration of existing theory, but rather a “*very different paradigm*” which will be adopted by tourism academics. An interviewee mentioned that in this scenario, it will be evident that “*as social science, tourism has a lot more to offer... because it's about people, behaviors, mobility, connections. As academia, again, it's got a bit lost because of the business*

*management dominance [before the pandemic].*” According to another participant, this paradigm will lead tourism academia to be “*more critical of globalization*” and “*excessive capitalism*”. Several respondents mentioned though that this paradigm-shift away from a pure advocacy approach will occur in academia only if it is also adopted by the field’s leading journals and funding bodies.

#### **4.2.2. Recovery: Tourism Academia and Revenge Tourism**

The second scenario assumes a relatively fast recovery, meaning that the pandemic ends within 2021 and is based on a “revenge tourism” (*i.e. tourists traveling more to make up for the time lost*) paradigm in tourism academia. This implies largely that tourism academia will keep predominantly promoting the increase of (a largely unchanged) tourism industry, but with new vigor. As one participant mentioned, “*I can’t see that there’ll be a new type of tourism emerging. I think we’ll just see a huge rebound in the same old type of tourism... when you constrain it a lot it bounces back a lot*”. Another that “*the ethical tourist was supposed to become the new mass tourist, they really haven’t. Again, I have seen this happen every generation or so. COVID is certainly changing the rules of the game, but I can’t see it changing the game all that much.*” This would put the primary focus of tourism academia on reviving and relaunching the tourism industry – much as it used to be – through a new and strengthened advocacy paradigm.

In terms of education, this will first and foremost underline marketing efforts to regain student numbers, highlighting the importance of tourism academia for reviving the industry. This will also suggest a focus on letting students know that employment in the sector is again needed. A participant mentioned that this will imply letting the students know that they can “*get relevant things to do when they get out [of university] when the industry comes back.*” This would not indicate big changes in curricula. One respondent said that the pandemic would not need to be in the center, as “*not everything is about COVID. They’ve still got to learn how to make a coffee or whatever.*” Other participants suggested that there would still be minor changes to tourism curricula, particularly about “*hygiene*”, “*safety measures*” and “*crisis management*”. Overall, students will be made aware of how important tourism is for global development and employment, and a heightened focus on the promotion of the industry is likely.

In this scenario, tourism academia will primarily assist the industry in restarting the tourism industry as fast and as numerous as possible. This is not so much focused on adapting the industry to new practices, but on “*increasing consumer confidence*” through marketing efforts. One participant mentioned that in this scenario we don’t talk about “*de-tourism, for example, de-marketing, but about finding new tools to draw tourists to come back*”. One respondent mentioned that business travel has suffered greatly but is vital for many destinations and needs to be relaunched. In terms of relating to the industry, this would accordingly imply a “*minor paradigm shift*”, as in the past years much of the consultancy was focused on managing “*over-tourism*”. Another interviewee mentioned that increasing consumer confidence might be particularly critical for the industry, as many tourists will still prefer “*staycations*” due to lasting and unfounded safety concerns. So, the industry might be confronted with a “*new consumer*” and a participant mentioned that the industry will need help “*to understand what the new consumer or in our case, the new tourist cares about.*” Increasing collaboration between academia and the industry is anyhow not seen as very likely in this scenario.

Research is likely to shift away from the critical agenda which had been adopted (e.g. over-tourism) and move into a new phase of tourism advocacy with fast recovery as a central focus. This will anyhow not change the predominant management-focus which tourism academia has adopted in recent years and this will reflect in the chosen research areas. Several participants mentioned that there will be an attempt to research an industry that has collapsed during the pandemic, particularly the “*cruise industry*”, “*airline industry*”, or “*event tourism*”. Another mentioned that “*revenge tourism*” will be a big topic, where “*tourists are traveling, even more, to catch up with things they have missed during the pandemic*”. Although this research would theoretically imply a bigger connection with the industry, several respondents have stated that in this scenario, most of the research work in tourism academia will stay self-serving. Accordingly, academics will keep on looking for “*money, grants, promotions, etc.*” when being published. Another stated that the predominant management approach adopted pre-pandemic by tourism academia “*never managed to get close to the industry*” as “*I can’t see that we have breached this gap I read about 20 years ago, because they [the industry] still tell us that we are not relevant.*” Accordingly, if a management predominance in research persists, in this scenario, the gap between the industry and tourism academia will persist and go largely unchanged.

Finally, this scenario does not presuppose any major changes in the discipline identity of tourism academia. Respondents mentioned that in this case, the field will continue its trend towards “*business*”, “*management*”, and “*marketing*” which has been evident in recent years. The pandemic will strengthen this relationship as advocacy and recovery of the tourism industry will be paramount.

#### 4.2.3. Adaptancy: Tourism Academia Bridging the Gap

The term “adaptancy” was originally used by Jafari (1990/2001/2007) to delineate the emergence of alternative forms of tourism in order to maintain benefits without (or limiting) the negative impacts. This term is adapted to tourism academia which needs to adapt in order to limit the impacts of the pandemic on the academic field. The third scenario assumes a slow recovery, meaning that the pandemic extends beyond 2021 and has long-term impacts on global tourism. Tourism academia will have to bridge the gap between academic work and the rapidly changing needs of the new tourism industry, strengthening a closer collaboration to overcome the crisis. A participant mentioned that in this scenario it will be “*time to show what we can do, how our research can be used by the industries. So be responsive to what happens and second, work closely with the industry.*” Another that tourism academia will be “*working alongside the industry and on another hand, trying to understand consumers. What are the threats that consumers are facing? What fears do they have and how can we help them to overcome those fears?*” According to this scenario, another said that “*academia should decide it is time to bridge the gap... we can build better bridges than other fields have.*”

In terms of education, participants mentioned that an ongoing pandemic would most likely lead to a drop in student numbers deciding to take up tourism degrees, particularly as there will be fewer jobs available. A respondent mention that to overcome this difficulty, successful universities will adapt their curricula. In the case of China, this is already applied and is likely to continue in this scenario, as tourism academia is going “*for liberal arts, cross-disciplinary with science and medical fields and probably, with history and arts.*” Accordingly, tourism education's future would be “*cross-disciplinary and working with computer science and medical schools [among others].*” A participant mentioned that this collaboration and “*bringing in top professors [from other fields] through online courses*” will be more likely to attract students to tourism degrees, rather than traditional tourism education. This will be

easiest for “*local students*” as they don’t have to travel. The future, in this case, will also lie in being “*more digitalized*”, combined when possible with “*small classroom teaching*.” An ongoing pandemic will also cause budget cuts in universities, which are likely to hit tourism departments, and “*students will be more likely to trust high ranked universities, due to their perceived higher levels of safety measures*.”

In this scenario, tourism academia will take every effort possible to bridge the gap between academia and the industry. One participant mentioned how this is likely to happen. Bridging the gap has been successfully done by other disciplines, such as “*medical and engineer schools*.” According to our interviewee, tourism academics will have to “*see how other people [disciplines] have identified the gap and bridged it, and to what level. Maybe we can do it better because we are doing it anew. Maybe we can build bridges better than they have*”. Several ways of bridging the gap in this scenario have been proposed by the interviewees. First, “*speaking their [industry] language*”, by proposing concrete changes such as “*I can increase your arrivals, I can come up with ways that tourists spend more per day*.” Second, another respondent said that this will make tourism academia less “*paper-dependent*”, but more focused on showcasing the work outside of academia. This will be particularly important for understanding a new consumer which, according to another participant, will have “*a significant change in human behavior, even being afraid to hug and kiss other people*”. In this scenario, there will be close ties particularly due to the need for the industry to “*dealing with limited international travel*”, manage “*local tourism and staycations*”, and “*serious risk and safety concerns*”.

In terms of research, in this scenario, there will be priorities related to the new forms of tourism emerging in the pandemic. An interviewee mentioned that “*the resurgence of distance*” will be a topic of interest, as the new tourist is faced with “*social distancing, which means, don’t get too close, dining restrictions, travel restrictions. In a short period, there will be a need to have policies and regulations to prevent proximity*.” In addition to the policy perspective, there will be also a need to investigate the psychological features of the “*new tourist*”, which will likely change even some of the most established tourism theories. A respondent mentioned that “*I think the disparity of those who travel and those who don’t will greatly change. There’s pent-up demand for those that are, if you were referring to Plog [1973], they would be allocentrics*.” But in this case, “*in your psychocentrics, there’s going to be more of those that have been in the past*”, as fewer risks are likely to be taken. In terms of research, to bridge the gap, tourism academia will thus have to understand “*the paradigmatic*

*change in which the whole system is going to behave*”, being in terms of industry, host, and guest, as well as governments.

In this scenario, the discipline identity of tourism academia will follow a multidisciplinary paradigm to shift towards a new reality of tourism, potentially attracting scholars from other disciplines towards the field. By bridging the gap between the industry and the difficulties faced by the ongoing pandemic, one interviewee mentioned that governments and practitioners “*will realize that we exist*”. Tourism academia will thus get attention from outside the field, while the difficulties to overcome will lead to “*internally acting more disciplinary than ever before*”. Respondents mentioned that this spotlight will have a dual effect, first “*attracting academics from other disciplines to engage with tourism phenomena*”, and second “*the possibility of internally studying ourselves through acting more disciplinary and united*”. This will ultimately lead to a multidisciplinary academic field of tourism that is acting in a more united and disciplinary way.

#### **4.2.4. Adaptancy: Tourism Academia in Decline**

The fourth scenario also assumes a slow recovery, meaning that the pandemic extends beyond 2021. In this scenario though, tourism academia fails to address real-world concerns of the suffering industry and other stakeholders. This will lead to a loss of credibility of tourism academia and the eventual decline of the field. As one participant put it, “*people will do what they're incentivized to do in the university system: to publish in journals that are behind paywalls, then that's what we'll do, so that's our measurement and it's no wonder the industry says, you are not relevant.*” Another that, “*it could be that we even get in a way less relevant if we are just 'COVID-watching' and try to publish for the sake of publishing*”. In this case, rather than other academics entering the field of tourism, tourism academics will move away towards other disciplines.

Tourism education will not substantively change. There will be no or very little inclusion of new emerging topics such as “*risk management*”, “*health and safety*” and the aforementioned collaborations with “*medical and engineer faculties*” among others. According to a respondent, the focus will still be on “*management*”, which in times of the pandemic will provide “*even less expertly trained graduates*”. In this scenario, education is also driven by a strong will to go “*back to the old normal*”, with a focus on in-class teaching or blended learning methods – which will limit particularly international student numbers as risk

perception will move students towards local universities. According to a respondent, if tourism departments would push these directions more than other disciplines, this will eventually lead to *“university directors saying ‘no, this is not the field we want to have’”*.

In this scenario, tourism academia will fail to bridge the gap with the suffering industry, which will put a spotlight on the field. According to participants, *“while for many people it will be utterly devastating in terms of their income and livelihoods”*, tourism academia will be driven by the opportunity of *“COVID-washing”* their publications through *“superficial and descriptive papers about the pandemic”*; *“publishing for the sake of publishing and promotion”*; and *“unwillingness to speak the language of the industry”*. Meanwhile, *“the industry will come up with their strategies, using trial and error... if we sit in a board room of a chain hotel, or airline, or Disney or whatever, we better keep our mouth shut, because we don’t have anything that translates into money, strategy, real things that people are willing to put their money behind”*. This will be strengthened by slow publishing times of academic journals, as according to our respondent, *“by the time they come out, it’s too late. The industry wants solutions tomorrow. By tomorrow, you have 24 hours from now, not 24 months from now when the article appears”*. Ultimately this will widen the gap and enhance mutual distrust between academia and the industry, leading to a worsening relationship.

In terms of research, this scenario assumes *“COVID-washing”* which, according to one of our respondents, refers to papers that were *“designed with nothing about COVID... so they just reframed it all with COVID-stuff... I think that’s unethical, but I think people are start going to do this”*. One respondent mentioned that this has already started *“I reviewed a paper since then [the onset of the pandemic] and I said, well, the paper was written a long time ago, just don’t make a paragraph about implications for COVID”*. The research will thus be largely *“descriptive”*, focusing on the *“why and not the how”*. Another respondent mentioned that in *“second and third-tier journals”* there will be a lot of *“highly cited publications with dubious quality”*, as academics will use them for gaining citations and eventually promotions. This also will widen the gap between tourism academia and the real-world impacts of the pandemic even further.

Finally, this will have a heavy impact on the discipline identity of tourism academia. As previously mentioned, a successful bridging of the gap will most likely attract scholars from other disciplines to tourism. The failure to do so, according to our respondents, will most likely have the opposite effect. As universities and the industry decide *“that we have nothing*

to say”, tourism scholars will likely attempt to attach themselves to other, more established disciplines, for example, “*sociology, marketing, management, geography, and anthropology*”. The attention which tourism academia is likely to get due to the suffering of the industry will in this case throw the field in a more negative light, ultimately leading to a steady decline.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to propose possible ways forward for tourism academia in light of COVID-19, including the paths of development leading to these scenarios. First, it is important to notice that the identified scenarios and the likelihood of different future scenarios are anyhow very context-dependent. Our respondents mentioned that tourism as an industry and as an academic field holds different values in different parts of the world. Evidence already shows that in certain countries, such as China domestic travel has been revived and tourism curricula have been diversified, whereas it was also mentioned that countries in the Pacific will not be like others as they aim to re-launch the industry as fast as possible. While it is not certain that the importance given to tourism academia directly links to the importance of the tourism industry, this is certainly a factor to consider as government and other types of funding might be connected.

First, temporal factors of recovery were found as particularly relevant in delineating the way forward for tourism academia. If the pandemic is fully declared as over within 2021, respondents confirmed that there will be a likely “power struggle” among tourism tribes, territories, and networks (Ren et al., 2010; Tribe, 2010), and the already existing split on management and humanities-focus is expected to prevail. The main question is likely whether tourism academia wants tourism to go back to “the old normal” or if the industry should restart more sustainably (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020b; Prideaux et al., 2020). Here it is important to remember that scenarios are not mutually exclusive (Kosow & Gaßner, 2008) and our respondents mentioned that in the case of recovery, both scenarios (sustainability and advocacy) might occur concurrently. It was also mentioned that tourism academia is by no means a unitary body, and the increasing global diversification of the field (Butler, 2015; Moscardo & Murphy, 2014) is likely to respond differently in different areas of the world. This has been already evident from our data, wherein some contexts steps have already been taken to diversify the tourism curricula (e.g. China), while other countries struggle more with relying on domestic tourism and domestic students (e.g. the Pacific Islands).

On a longer timescale, if the pandemic will not fully end within 2021, findings have shown to be more complex. Scholars have warned about an economic, political, and socio-cultural super-shock for the tourism industry (Baum & Nguyen, 2020; Dolnicar & Zare, 2020; Williams et al., 2020), while others of a strong change in tourist behavior (Li, Nguyen, & Coca-Stefaniak, 2020) and opportunities to move towards a more sustainable form of travel (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020a; b). Our findings have shown that this disruptive industry change if longer-lasting, offers an unprecedented opportunity and threat for tourism academia; to either “bridge the gap” to the industry (Butler, 2015) or eventually lose credibility as a field and fall into decline. Scenarios assuming a longer timeframe of the pandemic have highlighted persistent issues within tourism academia mentioned by other scholars, such as descriptive and superficial research, lack of interdisciplinary theory development, publishing for the sake of publishing, and overall disconnection with the industry (Butler, 2015; McKercher & Prideaux, 2014).

Second, although the intent of our paper was not normative, several points of focus for tourism academia can be identified from our scenarios. Respondents have pointed out that it would be dangerous to irresponsibly promote “revenge tourism” and “COVID-washing” research (making irrelevant research COVID-relevant by finding superficial conceptual links to it), scaling back on acknowledging sociocultural and environmental issues; while it was also highlighted that the suffering of the industry should come as a priority to mitigate the shock of the pandemic. In summing up possible suggestions for the successful progress of tourism academia given by our respondents, a focus was given on safe education (use of online tools, safety measures), offering help to the industry and governments through applied research (e.g. policies, consumer behavior), and possible collaboration with other disciplines (e.g. medicine, engineering).

Third, it is noteworthy to mention that generally tourism academia was perceived as “very vulnerable” by our respondents, confirming literature mentioning a low relevance to the industry, a lack of criticality, and an identity crisis within the field (e.g. Butler, 2015; Jafari, 1990/2001/2007; McKercher & Prideaux, 2014). Respondents showed concerns about the disconnect from the industry and the spotlight this perceived weakness might be getting during the pandemic. This might also be aggravated by the drop in the industry, which might discourage students from undertaking tourism degrees.

Fourth, the recent vaccine options with seemingly acceptable levels of effectiveness open a whole new research problem. Williams, Wassler, and Ferdinand (2020) recently published a paper, explaining that the growing misinformation spread on social media might lead to tourist vaccine hesitancy. Furthermore, they hypothesized that this might lead to tourist homophilia, choosing their travel destinations based on similar vaccine technology and policies. It cannot be excluded that a similar global fragmentation of COVID-19 vaccine policies will directly influence tourism academia, as more and less vaccine-hesitant “tribes” might be formed within. It can however be hypothesized that tourism and the new vaccine(s) will be a research priority for tourism academia in the upcoming years.

In terms of future studies, it is hoped that this study will lead to the discussion of a research agenda for tourism considering the scenarios proposed. This could also aid the identification of the “most likely” scenario for the field. This research agenda should also be compared critically to earlier published work where research agendas have been proposed pre-COVID (e.g. Deery, Jago, & Fredline, 2012; Edwards, Griffir, & Hayllar, 2008), and the growing literature on COVID-related research agendas (e.g. Cai, McKenna, Wassler, & Williams, 2020; Fredman & Margaryan, 2020; Higgins & Debiolles, 2020a; b; Rogerson & Baum, 2020; Sharma, Thomas, & Paul, 2021; Zenker & Lock, 2020). Although this study did not specifically focus on proposing a normative research agenda, it can also give practical (research) implications to tourism academics, which then can indirectly reflect on practitioners and policy-makers. First and foremost, the key findings show that the relationship between academia and the industry is a major concern for senior academics within the field. While this was not mentioned to be necessarily leading and following relationships, the findings would anyhow suggest that tourism academics look for collaboration and/or communication with the industry parts during and post-pandemic. Respondents have suggested that findings of research projects should be “translated” into industry language and presented to practitioners promptly. This would not imply detracting from academic publications but focusing on other media of communication side by side. On the other hand, the same was suggested for starting new research projects, namely listening to the industry’s most pressing needs during the pandemic. Respondents offered the metaphor of the industry “calling for help” and the academic needs to be “ready to listen”. Next, findings suggest that there is a need for tourism academia to foster inter-disciplinary collaboration with more established fields of study. Considering the pandemic, so far scarcely considered disciplines such as medicine and health studies have been mentioned. It was also suggested

that including non-tourism literature in studies about the pandemic might give more up-to-date information for framing research issues. Furthermore, our respondents have shown that certain countries have already adapted tourism curricula to the current and (presumably) future context. This again was heavily based on interdisciplinarity and focus on imminent issues of the industry. It could be hypothesized that if academics considered revising certain curricula, government funding might follow too. Finally, Williams et al. (2020) suggest that there is still an ongoing (mis)infodemic about issues such as vaccine-effectiveness and safety. It could be suggested that it is also the responsibility of the academic to inform and scientifically disprove “fake news” and conspiracy theories (Fedeli, 2019). Besides, topics such as “revenge tourism” and “COVID-washing” of research should be a major concern for the field.

Finally, this study must acknowledge several limitations. First, the chosen qualitative scenario method and sampling techniques have led to a relatively limited number of respondents. For this study, more interviewees had been contacted but the response rate was not very high (mostly due to privacy concerns). We therefore decided to focus on more experienced academics (in terms of years of experience and duties undertaken) with the purposive, experience-based sampling. This is a particularly critical limitation as findings show issues within tourism academia to be globally diverse, while we cannot claim the global representativeness of our sample. Follow-up studies could diversify samples to cover a wider range of respondents. In particular, it is not necessary that emerging scholars in the field have less knowledge of the issues at hand. On the contrary, their perspective might enrich the findings of this study. Second, respondents have highlighted that their opinion might be heavily biased by their own specific academic and personal background. The developed scenarios have offered different futures to overcome the bias of normative ways forward, but subjective preferences should still be acknowledged. Third, the given anonymity to respondents might make it less likely to deduct where precise information offered comes from. This, however, was asked by several of our respondents to guarantee higher levels of anonymity due to the at times controversial nature of the topic. Last, scenario methods are not a full description of the future, but rather just possible future developments. Readers should thus keep the awareness that this paper does not claim to make accurate predictions of the future development of tourism academia, but rather wants to highlight key points that should be discussed in further related studies and taken into account for the progress of the field.

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none

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none

Supplementary data

Supplementary material

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**Table 1: Interviewee Details**

Interviewee Number	Gender	Years of Experience in Tourism Academia	Country of Employment	Areas of Expertise
1	Male	31	Hong Kong SAR	Tourism consumer behaviour and product development
2	Male	25	USA	Benefits of travel and tourism marketing
3	Male	12	Pacific Islands	Tourism economics and sustainability
4	Male	8	UK	Consumer decision making and pricing
5	Male	25	USA	Tourism planning
6	Female	20	UK	Social practices around climate change, transportation and travel
7	Female	30	China	International tourism and tourism development
8	Male	50	USA	Anthropology
9	Female	25	UK	Human Resources

**Table 2: Abstracts of Scenarios**

Recovery	Adaptancy
<p><b>New Sustainability</b></p> <p><i>Most of the tourism academia adopts the values and expectations of a sustainable tourism recovery. Continuation of the use of online tools in education, industry consultancy for a sustainable recovery, sustainability research, and collaboration with the social sciences dominate</i></p>	<p><b>Bridging the Gap</b></p> <p><i>A new form of global tourism emerges, based on the ongoing challenges of the pandemic. A radical shift occurs, where international travel is limited, and tourism is localized and plagued by risk and safety concerns. This scenario is based on tourism academia going forward by bridging</i></p>

*the agenda. Trust is placed in sustainable practices to restart the tourism industry through creating long-term economic, environmental and sociocultural benefits. Academics, together with citizens and consumer groups, try to exercise growing corrective influence on the restarting tourism industry.*

#### **Revenge Tourism**

*Tourism academia takes decisive steps to reach the goals of a fast revival of global tourism to its pre-pandemic nature. Academic agendas are dominated by heavy marketing efforts to regain student numbers, relaunch conference travel, increase consumer confidence, and business consultancy. Environmental and social costs take a momentary backseat, as a revival of tourism and increase of tourist numbers are the priority. An increase in relevant consultancy projects for the industry and research agendas dominated by marketing and business-research is the consequence.*

*the gap between the academic field and the new industry. Tourism academia continues with online education, a focus on local students, and strengthens industry support significantly, mainly in terms of risk, safety, and health management. Accordingly, research output will shift largely towards practically applicable issues, such as consumer behavior, health issues, risk management, policies, transport, and domestic tourism. A new, multidisciplinary paradigm emerges to shift tourism academia towards a new reality of tourism, potentially attracting scholars from other disciplines towards the field.*

#### **Decline**

*This scenario assumes a long-lasting impact of the pandemic on global tourism and a lasting decrease in tourist numbers, tourism students, and the general relevance of the topic. Tourism academia continues to be removed from the practical change that has happened in the industry. Tourism education is seen as irrelevant as students struggle to find jobs in the industry, industry relationships are declining, research is largely focussed on low-quality output for academic survival and tourism scholars focus their attention on other fields and disciplines. A tacit consensus is reached that it is best to abandon the sinking ship before the catastrophe.*

## Highlights

- This study aims to propose possible ways forward for tourism academia in light of COVID-19.
- Interviews were held with tourism professors across Europe, America, Asia, and the Pacific Region.
- Four scenarios forward for tourism academia in light of the pandemic are proposed.
- The future of tourism academia is likely related to recovery or adaptancy.
- Scenarios proposed are related to new sustainability, revenge tourism, bridging the gap and decline.

## Author Bio

### **Philipp Wassler**

Philipp's research interests include philosophical issues related to travel, with a focus on phenomenology and social psychology.



### **Daisy X.F. Fan**

Daisy Fan's research interests include tourist-host social contact, ageing and wellbeing, tourists' ethnocentrism, cultural distance and cruise travel.



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