

2019

Our Place, Privilege and Prejudice? Deconstructing the Swing in Business Schools towards a 'Social Impact' Mission

Candice Harris

Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Erica Wilson

Southern Cross University, Australia

Jennie Small

University of Technology Sydney, Australia

Alison McIntosh

Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Nigel Morgan

Swansea University, Wales

See next page for additional authors

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Recommended Citation

Harris, Candice; Wilson, Erica; Small, Jennie; McIntosh, Alison; Morgan, Nigel; and Finnear, Jocelyn (2019) "Our Place, Privilege and Prejudice? Deconstructing the Swing in Business Schools towards a 'Social Impact' Mission," *Critical Tourism Studies Proceedings*: Vol. 2019 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.tru.ca/cts-proceedings/vol2019/iss1/5>

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Authors

Candice Harris, Erica Wilson, Jennie Small, Alison McIntosh, Nigel Morgan, and Jocelyn Finniear

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Facilitators: Dr. Candice Harris (Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand), Dr. Erica Wilson (Southern Cross University, Australia), Dr. Jennie Small (University of Technology Sydney, Australia), Dr. Alison McIntosh (Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand), Dr. Nigel Morgan (Swansea University, Wales), & Dr. Jocelyn Finniear (Swansea University, Wales)

Background

A neoliberal ideology focusing on greater accountability and managerialism has characterised business schools over the past twenty years, infusing approaches to research, teaching, industry engagement and academic career development. This has markedly changed the educational agenda, underscoring contemporary managerial philosophy, and promoting individualism and competitiveness within the university sector (Huang et al., 2016). As many tourism and hospitality programs sit within business or management schools, we as scholars and educators are affected by these shifting ideologies and competing priorities.

At the same time, we are interested in an apparently ‘new’ focus on impact – and particularly ‘social impact’ - in the business school context. The social impact agenda cuts across both teaching and research. In Australia, New Zealand and the UK, for instance, research assessment exercises reveal a move away from numbers and outputs, to the *impact* of that research – socially, culturally, and economically. Many business schools now purport to have a social impact, social entrepreneurship or social responsibility mission. Indeed, global accrediting bodies such as AACSB and EQUIS expect this of today’s contemporary business schools. For example, one of AACSB’s standards for accreditation is that business schools demonstrate commitment to ‘social and corporate responsibility’, whereby:

The school must demonstrate a commitment to address, engage, and respond to current and emerging corporate social responsibility issues (e.g., diversity, sustainable development, environmental sustainability, and globalization of economic activity across cultures) through its policies, procedures, curricula, research, and/or outreach activities (AACSB, 2019).

Goal

But what does this all mean for us as critical tourism scholars, who have long been interested in the ‘social’? The Critical Tourism Studies (CTS) community has evolved to become an international network of scholars who share a vision of producing and promoting social change in and through tourism practice, research and education. In the spirit of the CTS 2019 conference, this session will explore the opportunities, realities, conflicts and challenges around the social impact agenda.

We invite colleagues who are interested in a shared and rotating dialogue on social impact as it pertains to tourism teaching and research. Through a shared and rotating dialogue led by the Workshop Hosts, we want to encourage participants to freely discuss and debate these topics. A number of guiding questions will help steer the Workshop:

The Workshop

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The what

- How is your organisation defining and pursuing a social impact agenda in research, teaching and engagement? Relationship with human rights, indigenous rights, social justice, equality, diversity and inclusion etc?

The why

- While many critical scholars have been stressing social impact for decades, why are universities now consumed with this agenda – why is it now all the rage?
- Is there a genuine commitment to social impact or is it just another means for universities to *appear* ‘socially responsible’ and gain competitive advantage?

The how

- How do we, or can we, bring social impact into our teaching and research?
- Acting up and against – voicing opposition in university environment to pressure to pursue social impact ideals
- How do we assert social impact? What are the difficulties in measuring social impact?

The who

- Which stakeholders are we working with to consider social impact?
- How do we address critique surrounding the continued emphasis on ‘research’ for social impact, on populations who already feel ‘over-researched’, often by lone researchers with a different agenda and being, and mostly with outputs/outcomes that often don’t effect change in the community?
- How do we acknowledge our own race, ethnicity, and class; gender and sexuality; disability; diversity, difference, and intersectionality to consider our place and bias in social impact research?

References

- AACSB (2019). 2013 Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards for Business Accreditation (Updated January 2019)
- Huang, Y., Pang, S. K., & Yu, S. (2018). Academic identities and university faculty responses to new managerialist reforms: experiences from China. *Studies in Higher Education*, 43(1), 154-172.