

Should we have a tourism academic pledge?

The Oxford English Dictionary has defined a 'pledge' as a "solemn commitment to do or refrain from doing something; a promise, a vow". Pledges are well-known in the management of tourism with pledges such as the Palau Pledge and the North Greenland Pledge (Cooper et al., 2024) being applied to the sustainable management of particular tourism destinations. However, what of the responsibilities of tourism academia?

The tourism academy in the 21st century is characterised by an increasingly diverse collection of scholars who have the power through our research, teaching, and advocacy to influence the world of tourism. The present author believes that our diversity as an academy is our strength. And yet, in recent years we have seen many instances of academic conflict over what 'truth' is and siloing of values and perspectives along paradigmatical and ideological grounds (Schweinsberg et al., 2021). It is on this basis that the present author suggests that a discussion needs to take place regarding the merits of crafting a pledge for the tourism academy.

In recent decades academic pledges and/ or oaths have become common in a number of tertiary institutions and in particular scientific disciplines (e.g., Anderson & Eschr, 2020; Ravid & Wolozin, 2013; Siafakas, 2022). They are also a phenomenon that tourism academics are increasingly being requested to engage with, witness the climate change pledge circulated for academic discussion on TRINET (the Tourism Information Network). A number of tourism academics have subsequently chosen to sign up to this climate pledge (see Department of Computer Science and Technology, 2023). And yet, other tourism academics have criticized the pledge on the basis that it is an attack on academic freedom and suggested that pledges are an attempt to force through an argument that says there is only one way of understanding complex societal issues (see Butcher, 2024). Other critiques of pledges include the fact that they are usually voluntary and as such will likely make minimal impact on academics that are often overwhelmed by the range of compliance pressures put on them by tertiary institutions. There is also the suggestion that by signing up to a pledge, individual academics could be held negatively accountable by higher education institutions, government, or industry if they do not live up to those standards.

Against these views, however, is the reality that the tourism academy is a heterogeneous entity that cannot always agree on the correct future for the tourism industry. A pledge should not be naive to think that it would have the effect of harmonizing academic views on issues such as climate change, decolonization, sustainability, or gender as they apply to specific tourism management contexts. However, it can potentially serve a role in articulating a set of core values that may underpin our approach to dealing with our colleagues and other tourism stakeholders when discussing these issues. Just as the principle of "Ὁφειλεῖν οὐ βλάπτειν", "first, do no harm" (Siafakas, 2022, p. 58) underpins the Hippocratic Oath tourism academics need to consider what is the core goal of our academic work. We can approach this issue retrospectively from the perspective of our personal and collective legacies (Schweinsberg, 2024). However, there is also the opportunity for the academy to be proactive and enter into a discussion and reflection of our values and how they have influenced what we have done in the past to further the world of tourism and what we should do in the future.

With this in mind the present author would like to suggest that any tourism academic pledge should emphasize the core values of collegiality and fraternity. It should not be crafted in relation to any particular operational issue, which would lead it open to being curtailed by divisions between established interest groups. Rather, it should be developed as a legacy document, one that will be acceptable to people from different disciplinary perspectives and backgrounds, but also sufficiently adaptable that it can respond to changing circumstances within the academy. While the

operationalisation and administration of the pledge would be challenging given the breadth of the tourism academy and the fact that tourism academia is not a centrally regulated or licenced profession such as medicine; the fact that the formulation of such a pledge would spark discussion over the purpose of tourism academia is an outcome in itself. Perhaps such a discussion is “the true utility of the pledge” (Hill, 2017).

With these thoughts in mind, the following pledge is offered to the academy for its consideration and reflection.

A Tourism Academic Pledge

As a tourism academic I promise:

- I will never compromise my own morals when researching, teaching, and advising on the future of tourism.
- I will treat other people who hold different disciplinary perspectives to my own with respect and work to cultivate the same spirit of collegiality in my students.
- I will not take wider society’s acceptance of my knowledge for granted.
- I will endeavour to refine and cultivate tourism knowledge that is based on scientific best-practice.
- I will strive to give a voice to the marginalized in society, rejecting discrimination in all its forms.
- I will not be afraid to use my knowledge to empower others to address complex societal challenges and work for the betterment of the world.

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