

Learning and researching with others: Go-alongs and nature-based tourism

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Objectives | If academia is to do its part in re-thinking and transforming tourism, there is an urgent need for innovative methodologies and methods. Tourism research and higher education in tourism need to move beyond traditional ways and means of scientific reasoning if sustainable tourism development and regenerative tourism is to be part of the solution to counterfeit climate change challenges and the biodiversity crisis.

The need for innovative tourism methodologies and methods is especially urgent when nature is a focal actor, with whom academics wish to actively engage during and through research practices and processes. Tourism scholars saliently call for more collaborative and participatory methodologies focusing on researching with others and nature: research where researchers not only talk but also walk and increasingly drive, wheel, train, bicycle or something else with others (e.g. Anderson, 2004; Carpiano, 2009; Evans & Jones, 2011; Reed, 2002). For example, Bergeron et al. (2014, p. 110) define go-alongs as “an on-site interview, which can be conducted on foot (walk-along), by bike or by car (ride-along)” whereas Carpiano (2009, p. 264) defines go-alongs as “interviewing a participant while receiving a tour of their neighborhood or other local contexts”.

The aim of this presentation is to problematize go-alongs as a method to create new knowledge in tourism research and higher education. In doing so, the presentation draws in the authors’ two separate streams of research: the former focusing on researcher-participant interactions, the latter on student-teacher interactions. Across these two strands of research, the paper discusses the potentials and limitations of go-alongs for research, respectively higher education within tourism.

Methodology | This paper draws in two separate strands of research, the purpose of both is to unfold the potentials of go-alongs for participatory tourism research and education with nature and others.

The first strand of research focuses on potentials of go-alongs for participatory research with tourists, residents, and second-home owners. This study included 34 go-alongs with around 100

participants (Duedahl & Blichfeldt, 2020). Aiming to explore and test the potential of go-alongs identified in the first research, the second strand of research, the TriWadWalk 2022, focuses on potentials of go-alongs for higher education in tourism. The aim of this research was to explore the potentials of go-alongs for better teacher-student interactions with each other and nature. TriWadWalk 2022 aimed to explore routes to more integrative science for the Wadden Sea Region (<https://www.rug.nl/triwadwalk-2022-crossing-borders-blending-perspectives>). The TriWadWalk 2022, with support from the Common Waddensea secretariat; the Faculty of Spatial Sciences; the Wadden Academy; University of Southern Denmark and the European Union Erasmus Program, brought together a core group of ten scholars and ten students from Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark, who moved through the Wadden Sea Region by foot, bike, boat, and train to blend perspectives from different scientific fields.

Main Results and Contributions | The first 35 go-alongs were led by participants (residents and tourists) and allowed the researchers to navigate with others while being led along by the participants through four literal and figurative unknown terrains of nature (Duedahl & Blichfeldt, 2020). The first theme entails challenges of researchers navigating unknown terrains of nature, the second, challenges of navigating unknown terrains of socially engaging with others, the third, challenges of navigating unknown terrains of researcher disempowerment and the fourth, challenges inherent to navigating unknown terrains of embodiments. The TriWadWalks documented how being-in nature and being-with others, as well as the 1:1 ration of students and teachers, allowed for more vivid and equalitarian interactions between students and teachers than traditional classroom teaching. However, the TriWadWalks also showed that being-in and being-with others and nature does not automatically erase academic hierarchical positionalities or segregation. Therefore, the potentials of go-alongs for higher education can only be unfolded insofar teachers and students can navigate both the four unknown terrains identified in the first stream of research and the unknown terrain of leaving behind traditional academic hierarchical structures and positionalities: Accepting to be-along and go-along on more equal terms than traditional university settings and structures inspire.

Limitations | The research is qualitative and explorative and does therefore not generalize statistically. However, the findings may generalize analytically and thus, the five unknown terrains presented in this paper may apply to other tourism research in and with others and nature.

Conclusions | Go-alongs are a set of innovative, participatory methods, which may enhance potentials for being-in and being-with others and nature. To unfold these potentials, researchers need to embrace being-along in and with nature as the social and bodily navigation of unknown terrains with others. In the case of go-alongs with tourist and residents the researcher especially

needs to develop and nurture abilities to navigate unknown terrains of nature; unknown terrains of socially engaging with others; unknown terrains of (dis)empowerment and unknown terrains of embodiment. To unfolding go-alongs' potentials for higher education in tourism, students and teachers furthermore need to navigate the unknown terrains of fluidity and need to develop the ability to leave traditional academic positionalities behind .

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