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The impact of neoliberalism on higher education tourism programs: Meeting the 2030 sustainable development goals with the next generation

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ABSTRACT

Neoliberal influences can change the role of higher education towards training, which reduces their ability to instill the critical thinking skills needed to sustain the Sustainable Development Goals by future generations. Even though imparting critical thinking, decision-making skills, and ethical stewardship remain a mission of higher education, many universities are becoming more market-oriented due to insufficient public funding. Using an instrumental case study, this paper presents the findings of 14 qualitative interviews of full-time tourism academics from nine countries, highlighting the changing nature of tourism studies globally. Results indicate that consumer-centric policies and increased industry involvement in curricula are taking priority over sustainability pedagogy. Moreover, participants express a concern for their ability to enhance critical thinking skills in the next generation of tourism professionals. Four themes were found: the relevance of modern education, reallocation of resources, changing channels of communication, and the role of ethics in academia.

1. Introduction

Imparting critical thinking (CT) is a primary objective of higher education as a means to instill informed decision making in younger generations (Jamal, 2004; Tribe, 2002). These future professionals are expected to challenge the worldview in relation to power, privilege, hegemony, and hierarchical structures. It is generally agreed that academia strives to prepare students for a world that is multicultural, interdependent, and vulnerable to environmental and cultural exploitation (Haigh, 2008; Joseph, 2012; Mitchell, 2003). However, the nature of academia is changing to fill the needs of national economic objectives to satisfy employment gaps, promote innovation, and improve competitiveness (Olssen & Peters, 2005). Once considered a public good, education is becoming increasingly market-driven as public funding for education decreases and universities 'chase' tuition dollars. Moreover, these policies emphasize training over CT and tend to move education towards job-skill development in such areas as finance, accounting, and marketing, as a means to ensure student satisfaction (Caton, 2014).

The core rationale for neoliberalism is that scarce resources should be spent on the activities used to produce maximum economic and social gains. Neoliberalism is described as the economic practices where human-wellbeing is advanced through entrepreneurial freedoms and skills by advocating for strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism emphasizes: "material growth and capital accumulation as the antidote to poverty; a rational, scientific approach to resource management; emphasis on privatization, competition, and individual entrepreneurship; and commodification of landscapes as 'natural capital" (Fletcher, 2009, p. 270).

This paper primarily addresses the changing nature of academia as neoliberal policies are stripping away the autonomy of universities (Harris, 2005), requiring a pedagogy that challenges the social and political construction of knowledge, and implanting that in curricula (Joseph, 2012, Caton, 2014). These embedded neoliberal ideologies lean towards a market-based system in which education becomes training for the global tourism industry, rather than a public good enhancing society as a whole. In this system, scholars are no longer seen as the experts in the field, but rather as facilitators or trainers for preparing the next generation of employable workers (Jankowski & Provezis, 2014). Dredge et al. (2013) argue that, "the structured and patterned activity embedded in traditional modes of instruction needs to change and that a learner-centered approach that embraces active open-mindedness could promote greater engagement in the process of learning and (critical) thinking" (p. 91).

The goal of sustainable development is to ascertain that there is an equitable distribution of costs and benefits in resource use, so that the needs of future generations are considered when making economic decisions today (International Institute for Environment and

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Table 1
The sustainable development goals.

1	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
3	**Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages**
4	**Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all**
5	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all
8	**Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all**
9	**Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation**
10	Reduce inequality within and among countries
11	**Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable**
12	**Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns**
13	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (in line with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change)
14	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16	**Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels**
17	**Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development**

Goals listed in bold relate to sustainable tourism development.

Development, 2002, p. xvi). In September 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by all member states of the United Nations (Table 1). The agenda for these goals focuses on ending poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring prosperity for all (United Nations, 2015). The 17 SDGs were developed from, and replace, the former Millennium Development Goals of 2000. Updates to the new SDGs include a target for quality education (Goal 4), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), as well as industry, innovation, and infrastructure (Goal 9).

As international policy organizations position tourism development as a tool to support the SDGs (UNWTO, 2015), this paper argues that the structure of tourism academia has influence on the future ability of tourism to uphold these goals. Sustainable tourism is often viewed as the 'ethics' of tourism education, and institutions must "ensure that graduates have the knowledge and skills to act as responsible and ethical stewards for the development of sustainable tourism" (Dredge et al., 2013, p. 96). Sustainable tourism is deeply connected with the SDGs of global awareness and transformation, and integration of the SDGs within higher education implies a responsibility to contribute to the long-term success of these goals.

Research on education in sustainable development has not adequately addressed the influence of neoliberalism on tourism higher education. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate how academic policies are impacted by neoliberalism, how the role of educators is changing in academia, and how institutions support the sustainable development goals through tourism education and the development of CT. This exploratory qualitative study examines the perspectives of 14 faculty members in higher educational institutions (HEIs) across nine countries. The article highlights how neoliberal ideologies have influenced the workplace for faculty, primarily in tourism and leisure studies departments, and its potential effects on the quality of education. This paper considers the changing nature of faculty roles, student influence, and the involvement of industry in shaping tourism curricula, and how these changes affect the ability of academia to instill CT skills in future tourism professionals.

2. Literature review

Neoliberalism is well documented in tourism literature. Kline and Slocum (2015) claim that the global governance system has shaped the way in which tourism is represented and valued through reduced government support and a reliance on donor funding to maintain environments and communities. Their primary argument lies in the resulting loss of confidence for emerging states in the 1980s to effectively manage their own economies. Specifically, in relation to natural resource management, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide an opportunity to send scarce funds to areas and activities where the greatest economic and social gains can ensue, resulting in the support of NGO work by the United Nations World Tourism Organization and other multinational agencies. Fletcher (2009) claims that neoliberal policies have brought community resources under the 'protection' of the Global North, leading to increased isolation, altering lifestyles, and inflicting local populations with the negative impacts associated with tourism visitation. Yet, others see neoliberalism as an opportunity to empower local communities by supporting democratic principles and greening capitalism through increased social consciousness (Kline & Slocum, 2015; Ojeda, 2012).

While tourism as an industry is primarily controlled by private enterprise, and many of the SDGs emphasize entrepreneurship at the local level, tourism is dependent on the public good that constitute the visitor experience. 'The public good refers to those services or commodities that provide value to society as a whole, but suffer from a lack of investment because, traditionally, profits are hard to capture. Dinica (2016) claims that the funding focus is now on using market structures that support tourism services through increased concession contracts with national and international corporations. The idea is that concessionaires pay fees to governments, creating a revenue stream to support conservation and community development initiatives; however, as infrastructure is developed and focus moves towards increased revenue generation, the number and type of visitor changes resulting in a more mass tourism product (Dinica, 2016). Therefore, neoliberal policies might influence the way sustainable tourism is operationalized at the local level (Slocum, 2017).

It is important to note that the SDGs are also well rooted in the neoliberal policy system. According to Weber (2017), the policy to "leave no one behind", as explicitly stated in the SDGs, "rests on specific ideological premises: it is designed to promote and consolidate a highly contested neoliberal variant of capitalist development" (p. 399). Some authors claim that the SDGs are based on the premise of self-actualization, where corporations are often used to "modernize" traditional industrial practice (e.g., agriculture), "develop" communities neighboring natural areas, and instill entrepreneurial culture in traditional societies (Gabay & Ilcan, 2017). Therefore, one could argue that the sustainable development goals themselves fit very well into the definition of neoliberalism given by Harvey (2005).

2.1. Neoliberalism in academia

Higher education has faced many of the same challenges that other public services have encountered; specifically, decreased funding and

the influx of private and corporate universities that offer new forms of learning for working individuals (Allen, 2011; Brackmann, 2015). Mitchell, Leachman, and Masterson (2017) claim that in the United States, the public two- and four-year colleges' overall state funding was almost $9 billion below the level in 2008. The decline in state funding has resulted in higher tuition costs and reduced educational quality as colleges attempt to balance budgets by reducing faculty size, limiting course offerings, and closing satellite campuses. This makes university education less affordable and less accessible to the students most in need.

Many public universities engage in neoliberal practices by aligning with activities and developing policies that engage with the market forces that help to make up for funding losses from the state (Brackmann, 2015). Neoliberal reforms are introduced through market principles, discourse of competition, and internationalization of the student body (Olsen & Peters, 2012). Universities face scarce resources and must be conscientious of the partnerships and collaborations they engage with in the market (Brackmann, 2015). Moreover, pressure to be rated at the top and earn external funding has brought 'academic capitalism' to the forefront of the agenda for HEIs. HEIs must compete among other universities for funding and student enrollment, which encourages a more entrepreneurial approach. This 'entrepreneurial university', as described by Allen (2011), is concerned with maximizing resources and managing organizations within the constraints of their environment. One issue with the 'entrepreneurial university' is that HEIs are expected to fill the role of innovation while being responsive to the changing needs of society (Simons & Masschelein, 2009).

In this regard, one of the university's roles is preparing students for the workforce. Naidoo and Williams (2015) state, "pressures for direct accountability to government and external stakeholders have undermined the power and autonomy of the professoriate" (p. 212). Whereas, in previous decades, the main purpose of the university focused on teaching and valuing knowledge, this era has shifted towards an "accountability paradigm" (Jankowski & Provezis, 2014, p. 479) where knowledge learned is to be socially relevant and applicable to the workforce. Education is seen as a commodity, in which the outcome is a skilled and knowledgeable worker. Fig. 1 shows the relationship between market-based education and socially driven education and their relationship to the SDGs. This figure is derived from the literature on sustainable tourism and the authors' reflective process.

A very illustrative example are the pre-neoliberal conditions in the UK. Writing almost 20 years ago, Middleton (2000) states, "The autonomy that British universities enjoyed had allowed academics to design curricula that appealed only to the academically minded and was spawning a breed of graduates who lacked entrepreneurial skills, practical know-how, or a capacity to adapt to new circumstances" (p. 546). Middleton differentiates between the two strands of neoliberal ideas: neoclassical orthodoxy and the Austrian school of economists. The first defends that, left to its own, the market often fails to perform effectively, in which case, state intervention is useful in controlling monopolies and promoting competition. The second disputes compatibility between the state and the market but promotes the market's benign effects in competition as suppliers respond to the ongoing and continually shifting tastes of consumers. Some of the consequences of the market orientation of HEIs in the UK are described by Middleton (2000) to be: rising marketing and identification of favorable market niches, making institutions attractive to potential students/customers, establishing customer choice as a key determinant of access, and a new emphasis on outcomes and performance. The standardization of courses, uniform levels and credits, and the facilitated movement between courses and institutions through enhanced comparability contribute to the increase in customer's (student's) flexibility and choice. The government anticipates that students become more rational consumers with fostered vocationalism, as they care about the post-graduate use of their education. That, on its end, gives universities a strong incentive to be responsive to students' wishes and foster diversity. These HEI reforms in the UK have led to the vision of a "New Learning Age" where a commitment to life-long learning is heavily influenced by a consumerist ideology.

Additionally, some universities are enhancing their market share through distance education options. As more universities create online programs to expand their global market share in the United States (Jankowski & Provezis, 2014), the nature of the courses offered is changing to meet the demand of students such as work-based practice rather than research-based knowledge (Olssen & Peters, 2005). More so now, than in previous decades, market forces and competition among European universities have a greater impact on their success (Naidoo & Williams, 2015). As universities strive to protect their academic excellence and build their reputation (and rankings) to attract potential students, they are also seen as a service provider that caters to their client, the student (Jankowski & Provezis, 2014). In a global assessment of academia, Olson and Peters (2012) describe the teaching/learning relationship as a "contract between buyer and seller" (p. 135), where universities are selling their product (i.e., degrees) to students and accepting funding from the market to support their growth. This reconceptualization of students as consumers (Naidoo & Williams, 2015) has the potential to shift the balance of power where young students (i.e., 18–22 years of age) determine which subjects should be taught and which content is appropriate to achieve their employment goals. However, there are reasons to be cautious of assuming all students fit the profile of the rational consumer. Based on their research of students in Portugal, Tavares and Cardoso (2013) find there are varying reasons outside the pressures of market forces that influence students' selection of a university and/or area of study. In the same study, students also choose universities based on an interest for a particular area of study (i.e., specialization), a socialization process (i.e., being informed by family and friends), or personal preferences (i.e., communication vs. competition goals), which were not connected to an economic rationale.

Further impacts of the neoliberal agenda on academia as a whole include: larger class sizes to accommodate increased enrollment alongside fewer full-time faculty; more weight being given to externally funded research for faculty seeking tenure; and research initiatives emphasizing profit over producing new knowledge (Rose & Dustin, 2009). In their qualitative study at a public university in Chile, Guzmán-Valenzuela and Barnett (2013) examine the ways 20 academics experience and manage their time in the workplace. The overburdened workload and time-consuming tasks are found to reduce the opportunity to research and develop as a scholar. Time in the office is described as discontinuous because staff and students frequently interrupt the completion of administrative tasks. These bureaucratic tasks are demotivating to some because they were lengthy and perceived as a tool of control regarding where and how long academics worked.

Government institutions are known as bureaucratic agencies. Public universities are also part of this government system. Universities require extensive accreditation, both by public education departments and outside agencies. Ranking and rating of universities has become a primary marketing tool, where media outlets provide consumer information, such as value for money, quality of life indicators, and earning expectations for graduates of specific institutions. Although one could argue that universities have always been bureaucratic (Guzmán-Valenzuela & Barnett, 2013), neoliberal changes are impacting the nature of the bureaucracy academics face. In the traditional sense, bureaucracy is the process of top-down decision-making, characterized by specification of functions, hierarchies, and fixed rules of governance. In the neoliberal sense, bureaucracy is the sheer number of tasks that academics are required to complete in order to fulfill their job requirements (Johnson & Libecap, 1994).

The role of educators is also changing as horizontal hierarchies move academics into marketing, administrative, and advising roles (Haigh, 2008); whereas, simultaneously increasing teaching loads to ensure educators are 'earning' their way. The rising number of contract

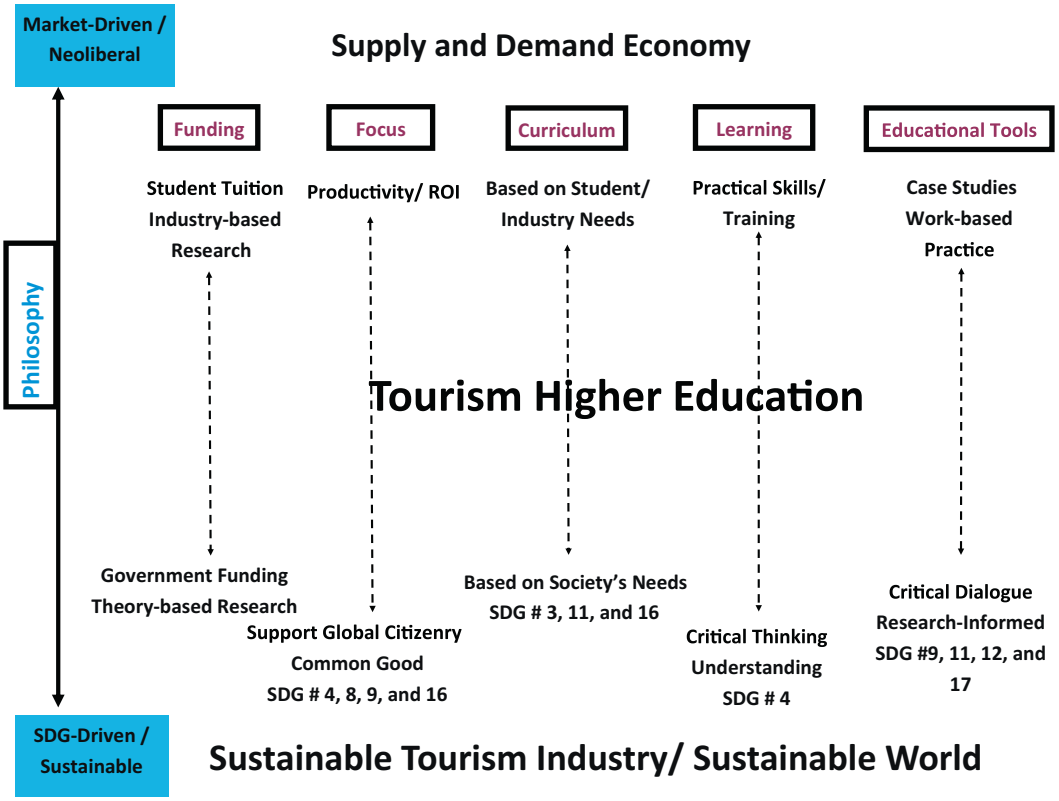

Fig. 1. Relationship between HEIs and the SDGs.

instructors and adjunct faculty replacing tenured positions are becoming more characteristic of many universities (Connell, 2013; Joseph, 2012). Universities, such as those in Australia, rely on term positions (i.e., academic positions without a research component), reducing students' exposure to research-informed pedagogies (Joseph, 2012). These practices have the ability to influence course materials and outcomes away from developing a more sustainable tourism industry and favor industry skills that privilege the economic bottom line. Their voice is not fully considered within academic departments, who may therefore not have a complete understanding of the overarching curriculum and the governing values of programs (Connell, 2013). This situation might perpetuate the lack of CT instilled in higher education (Joseph, 2012), which in turn might limit students' understanding of how to incorporate 2030 SDGs in their future employment.

2.2. Critical thinking

Brookfield (1997) describes CT as a social process where people work together to better understand and reflect on ideas in new ways. This social process involves a multitude of experiences, contributions, and perceptions for CT to evolve (Brookfield, 1997). Some researchers question whether today's students are challenged to be critical thinkers and understand philosophical perspectives such as sustainability (Jamal, 2004; Tribe, 2002). In a study of 400 employers, Hart Research Associates (2015) attempts to understand which learning outcomes are most valued among employers with regard to long-term career success. The key findings are that broad learning and the ability to apply it in real-world settings is believed to be the best preparation for college students. When hiring recent graduates, CT was rated fifth out of the six most important learning outcomes, superseded by effective oral communication, teamwork, writing, and decision-making skills. From Hart Research Associates' (2015) example, it is evident how broad market skills often supersede the value of CT within the industry.

An interdisciplinary approach to developing curricula is one possible way to integrate new knowledge and CT into the classroom. Annan-Diab and Molinari (2017) argue that this approach to learning facilitates blended connections between the discipline, problem solving, openness, and is thus aligned with the 16th SDG of promoting peaceful and inclusive societies. Wilson and von der Heidt (2013) investigated the curricula of first year business and tourism courses at a university in Australia regarding barriers to incorporating sustainability. Their findings showed three challenges for embracing and embedding sustainability in academics, including a crowded curriculum, resistance by staff and students, and the complexities of the teaching environments (i.e., online courses, international partners, multiple campuses). Faculty report a lack of space in the curriculum to incorporate the concept of sustainability, even if they are interested in including it. For example, curricula are generally pre-determined, the content is dictated by the schools or prioritized by accreditation processes, and the skill sets are determined by certain professional qualifications (Wilson & von der Heidt, 2013). Some faculty think theoretical or higher-order concepts, such as sustainability, should be postponed for advanced courses or graduate degrees. Others seemed to be less versed in the issue of sustainability or uninterested in incorporating it into the curricula.

There has been a substantial amount of literature and research on neoliberalism and higher education (e.g. Caton, 2014; Naidoo & Williams, 2015; Rose & Dustin, 2009); however, less scholarship has addressed how neoliberal policy affects the ability of the next generation of professionals to integrate the SDGs within future tourism systems. There is a call for researchers to explore how sustainable tourism is integrated within tourism curricula "to help teach students (who are our future transformational tourism leaders) to act in sustainable, ethical, and environmentally responsible ways" (Wilson & von der Heidt, 2013, p. 132).

3. Methodology

This research is qualitative, involving interviews with 14 academics in nine different countries. It utilizes an instrumental case study

approach as presented by Stake (1995) where the researchers use multiple cases to explain relationships within a specific phenomenon – how academic policies are impacted by neoliberalism, how the role of educators is changing in academia, and how institutions support the relevant SDGs through tourism education and critical thinking. The goal is to review numerous situations simultaneously in an attempt to generate a broader appreciation of a particular issue. The case study technique is applied on an individual participant level, not to whole organizations.

Participants were selected based on a convenience sampling. An invitation was sent to potential participants using an international listserve (TRINET) that links academics, graduate students, and industry professionals within tourism and related fields. Potential candidates self-selected their participation by contacting the researchers directly; however, certain qualifying criteria applied. Participants had to be employed full-time at an institution of higher education, specifically within a tourism or related program, and possess a terminal degree (e.g. PhD, EdD). Moreover, all interviews were conducted over Skype in either English or Spanish (based on the geographical context of respondents), and participants needed a command of one of those two languages. Qualifying candidates were sent the interview questions in advance, so they had an idea of the subject material.

The authors recognized the potential biases inherent in the self-selection process and did not attempt to generalize the results of this study. Self-selection biases might be related to the participants having a strong position on the subject matter, a personal interest to be heard, and/or skewing some of the selection criteria (such as the field of study, or the exact type of full-time positon). The above listed biases were justified by the fact that the study was inductive and sought to engage any interested academics in order to pilot the topic of connection among tourism education, UN's SDGs, and neoliberalism in HE. Moreover, the researchers employed Robinson's (2014) suggestions to reduce the impact of bias on the results, specifically: the use of multiple people to code the data, having participants review the results, verification using multiple data sources, and checking for alternative explanations.

All interviews were recorded and lasted between 50 and 90 min and took place between December 2016 and February 2017. Transcriptions were done by another author, who also spoke fluent English and Spanish, in order to ensure a fresh perspective and to avoid any preconceptions or personal opinions the interviewing author might have obtained in the process of the interviews. All transcriptions were returned to the interviewees for final approval and any adjustments to their comments were noted and applied. The translation from Spanish into English was not performed using back-to-back method because the content subsequently received participant approval (Epstein, Osborne, Elsworth, Beaton, and Guillemin (2015). All participants chose pseudonyms (this method was selected in order to facilitate the participant review of the findings and discussion as suggested by Robinson, 2014), which are used in the discussion section. Table 2 shows the diversity of participants in this research.

Data analysis involved content analysis or “making replicable and valid inferences from texts or other meaningful matter to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18), and constant comparative analysis, using literature review and participants' input throughout the process of data collection and constantly comparing codes, themes, and categories of data for ensuring consistency of application (Merriam, 1998) in order to link the emerging themes Coding and theme formation were guided by the literature review of extant studies in neoliberalism and sustainability in the field of higher education. Key words from the literature were compared with reoccurring key words in the interview transcriptions (e.g. academic agency, course content, curriculum, education, educational reform, events, globalization, governmentality, higher education, higher education policy, hospitality, internationalization, knowledge economy, managerialism, neoliberalism, pedagogy, tourism, tourism studies, tourism education, university culture). Trustworthiness (the equivalent of quantitative validity and credibility in qualitative research; having findings approved by the constructors of multiple realities) was achieved through a triangulation procedure of the main data sources: interviews, member check verifications, audit trail, and independent researchers' reports, as recommended by Merriam (1998) and Yin (2013).

It is important to note that not all respondents claimed an increase in neoliberalism at their universities. For example, Dacka claims that neoliberal policies are not yet apparent in Turkish public universities, which are still well funded by the state; however, there is evidence that the increase in private universities has an influence on the curriculum offered at public institutions. In addition, Elizabeth is not seeing the influence of neoliberalism at her university in Canada; whereas, North, also in Canada, is seeing a more noticeable impact. Sunny discerns these changes “sneaking in” at her Canadian university. Bea claims that the change to a more socialist government in Ecuador has reduced neoliberal tensions at her university. Scottie, who resides in Scotland where education is still government funded, recognizes unique ways neoliberalism is influencing his institution. Therefore, this study offers a culturally diverse view on neoliberalism.

4. Results

The SDGs provide a valuable framework for the future development of tourism. Although it can be argued that there is more within the SDGs than can adequately be covered in a typical curriculum, tourism curricula is a vital step in ensuring that the goals themselves become sustainable and remain relevant to the future of tourism. In line with Annan-Diab and Molinari (2017), this paper argues that ethics is dependent on CT skills, which requires a deeper assessment of the global tourism system. It is not about teaching the SDGs, specifically, but in applying these concepts for future generations to make informed decisions about the environment, society, and the development of an ethical tourism product (Dredge et al., 2013). There are four themes that emerged from the analysis and are discussed in more detail: the relevance of modern education, reallocation of sources, changing channels of communication, and the roles of ethics in academia.

4.1. The relevance of modern education

Twelve of the 14 respondents agree that HEIs are placing greater emphasis on meeting students' needs in order to generate revenue and build a solid reputation. In turn, they argue that the students maintain the purchasing power, which influences the subject material and the course selection (Naidoo & Williams, 2015). These influences are redefining which content is appropriate and which skills sets should be acquired from the respondents' institutions. Students have an expectation of what a university education will provide for them later in life, rather than valuing the process of life-long learning. In other words, education in these universities is based not only on course outcomes, but also on what students can do with their degree. This is in direct conflict with SDG #4 (promote life-long learning for all). As respondent, Bruce (USA university), says:

> Customer satisfaction is one of the key things that we're really concerned about and that's part of a major way of measuring my performance, not in terms of research alone but also how satisfied my students are. Happy students are good customers and that's what a lot of the stress is on now.

There is a consensus between the interviewees that not only must student expectations be met, but that there is a new generation of students who are empowered to demand the job skills and the curriculum they seek. Elizabeth (Canada) mentions, “students increasingly see themselves as clients or customers, who are demanding satisfaction, and I think that's not a bad thing”. Moreover, a future generation that acknowledges and recognizes the importance of empowerment may be

Table 2
Project participants.

Name	Country	Academic status	Discipline	Tenured	Teaching, research, service (%)	Neoliberal ideologies present
Bruce	USA	Assistant professor	Event management	No	75-25-0	Yes
Isis	Mexico	Professor	Tourism	No	30-50-20	Yes
Rod	New Zealand	Associate professor	Tourism	Yes	40-40-20	Yes
Scottie	Scotland	Full professor	Tourism/human resource management	Yes	40–40-20	Yes
Elizabeth	Canada	Professor	Leisure/tourism	Yes	40–40-20	No
Alex	USA	Assistant professor	Anthropology	Yes	50–35-15	Yes
Dacka	Turkey	Associate professor	Tourism/hospitality	Yes	25–65-10	No
Bea	Ecuador	Associate professor	Tourism	Yes	50–50	No
Wendy	USA	Assistant professor	Tourism	No	40–50-10	Yes
North	Canada	Professor	Tourism	Yes	33–33-33	Yes
Sonia	Brazil	Associate professor	Tourism planning	Yes	60–30-10	Yes
Kim	USA	Professor research associate	Recreation/park mgmt.	No	45–3-2	Yes
Sunny	Canada/USA	Associate professor	Tourism/hospitality	Yes	40–40-20	Yes
Sally	The Netherlands	Associate professor	Ethics & tourism	No	60–35-5	Yes

inclined to support these issues once employed. As Ojeda (2012) identifies, empowerment can lead to increased democracy, which aligns with SDG # 16 (promote peaceful and inclusive societies).

The question at hand is how education attempts to meet these expectations without losing sight of institutional priorities promoting welfare for society as a whole. Alex (USA university) explains, “As long as you are making your department, school, and university an actor within society, instead of retreating on the hilltop, I think that you will be able to change along with society a little bit better”. In sustainability, the needs of future generations should be valued equally with the values of today's society. Therefore, universities are in a unique position to hear and react to the needs of future tourism professionals. SDG #8 recognizes the need for full and productive employment and decent work for all. Therefore, job skills must be a part of higher education today.

Dacka's university in Turkey applies a more traditional education system with focus on the theoretical nature of tourism. Yet, there appear to be issues with how the education system impacts the future industry success of students. Dacka comments:

> When (students) get out of here, they are having a hard time adapting to the industry because they are not able to contribute in a professional way. And while there are some issues with the social and environmental effects of tourism, you first need to make the industry professional (by) making our students more competent for working in the industry.

As Turkey faces many challenges in developing a sustainable tourism industry, the public institution's primary role is to develop the skills to support tourism as a viable economy, in the first place. This observation is supported by Caton (2014) who notes that the transformation of university education into a private good results in defining the skill sets that drive the tourism industry to support national economic agendas. SDG #9 (build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation) cannot be achieved without quality job skill development. In other words, Turkish universities need to address society's needs in Turkey, which may be different from societal needs in other countries.

Emphasis on job skills does not imply that philosophy and CT must be absent. Perhaps, it is in how we integrate CT into the job skill lesson that requires a new approach. Yet, how effective HEIs have been in this aspect is still debatable. Kim (USA university) reminds us:

> Until we, as a democracy, start to appreciate, again, the value and the need for people to be educated in diverse subjects, diverse knowledge base, be critical thinkers, to be problem solvers, to reason for one's self and come to one's own decisions without being pushed, the higher education system, I think, is in danger.

Scottie (Scotland) also agrees that public education is “on the back foot” of integrating CT into discussions that promote job skills. Wendy (USA university) provides insight:

> They don't want to write and they don't want to read. So, I think in order to combat that, we really need to make them recognize the value in what we're doing. We tell them why they need to be able to write well and why they need to know how to do research. I think when we explain that to them, they understand that this needs to be a part of their education (even if) they thought they were paying tuition for something else. It is important for their lives and their wellbeing as professionals.

In effect, participants acknowledge the changing nature of academia at their institutions. This paper does not judge what is ‘right’ or ‘wrong,’ but does highlight the changing nature of academia, in part, because of changes in student expectations and the wider tourism industry needs. Specifically, the interviewees express concerns relating to the influences of customer expectations and student employment opportunities, As students are required to pay more for higher education (Mitchell et al., 2017), it is only natural that their role as powerful stakeholders will influence how change is negotiated in HEIs.

4.2. Reallocation of resources

According to Guzmán-Valenzuela and Barnett (2013), universities are prone to bureaucratic practices based on their access to resources. It appears that these bureaucracies influence student success, specifically related to fiscal responsibility. Bea (Ecuador university) provides an interesting example as she describes the need for her program to offer cooking classes in order to support a food and beverage program.

> They say nobody left behind, if they need to study, you have to provide them with everything. With the new policies, students can't pay for anything, we have to provide them with everything so they can cook. But, the bureaucracy means that they never have their products on time for their cooking class, so they need to bring everything anyway.

Isis adds that at her Mexico university, “sometimes you have to buy your own tools,” meaning that academics often work without computers or other necessary teaching and technology devices. Moreover, respondents have noticed an increase in the number of students employed while trying to maintain their studies in order to reduce the debt burden after they graduate, but also due to the need of experience to be competitive after graduation. One may question how these practices work towards SDG #16 (build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels) when students and faculty have to pay extra for the basic tools of education.

Moreover, universities are in a position to encourage or discourage investments in certain types of education. Neoliberalism has led to an increased emphasis on STEM programs (science, technology,

engineering, and mathematics). STEM provides an opportunity for intellectual capital that delivers revenue streams for universities. In turn, as governments reduce spending through fewer grant opportunities, the social sciences are falling behind in fiscal support. According to Mitchell (2003), both businesses and federal agencies insisted that Canadian students from public schools were lagging behind their peers in STEM education because of a failing multiculturalism experiment. Rod, at a New Zealand university, expands:

> In terms to how much money the government contributes per student, there is more money going into those STEM subjects in comparison to those students who might be doing business or liberal arts/humanities. Of course, this sets those humanities faculties at a disadvantage as students see those science subjects as a better value. So, universities will be rewarded for teaching subjects, which are going to pull people into jobs.

There is documented evidence that STEM industries are still primarily a man's world, and many countries are attempting to encourage female participation (Beede et al., 2011). Beede et al. claim this is because there is a lack of female role models, gender stereotyping, and less family-friendly flexibility in the STEM fields. One could argue that encouraging STEM participation for women helps achieve SDG #5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), but currently women reside in the behavioral science (National Science Foundation, 2017) that are seeing a reduction in resources. This affects both women academics as well as the female student body.

Universities are also changing their priorities in relation to spending. Findings show the reliance on adjunct (part-time faculty) is a major concern for three primary reasons (Connell, 2013; Joseph, 2012). First, many adjuncts come from industry and do not have adequate exposure to teaching pedagogies. Second, adjunct faculty are not fully integrated into the department and do not have access to the overall academic goals of a program. Third, adjuncts are contract employees with limited stability from year to year. Bea (Ecuador university) has noticed a large change since the reduction in neoliberal policies at her institution in Ecuador. She tells us:

> The majority of us now have economic stability and very good contracts. That wasn't the case before. You wouldn't know if you were going to teach the next time. Now, we have all the benefits of the law. We have stability, and are here full time, (which) helps the students because we can mentor them. We are there if they have any questions, and they can visit us.

Whereas at his Canada university, North has noticed the rise in the number of adjuncts as budgets have been tightened. He states:

> With more students there's a limit to how many professors can teach those students. Basically, it's easier to contract lecturers, lecture by lecture, year after year. Because if one year there's less students in one program, then you don't have to spend that money. That's where we get that neoliberal competitive market. The lecturer is not as protected as we are, and they are more against each other to get the classes, which the university kind of likes because they pay them less, they don't have to give them an office, a phone, a computer, and when they don't need them anymore, they just don't rehire them.

Sunny (Canada/USA universities) adds that many of these adjuncts in her department are women. Neoliberalism has the potential to influence fiscal responsibility leading to the hiring of fewer PhDs and more contract teaching employees (Dinica, 2016). These practices have the potential to negatively impact SDG #4 (gender equality and empower all women and girls) and #8 (full and productive employment and decent work for all).

Participants in this study emphasized the negative repercussions of neoliberal changes on the equitable distribution of university resources. In short, their tourism programs appear to be hard hit by policy changes that privilege STEM disciplines, the lack of commitment to research staff, and the hidden costs passed to students and academics. Moreover, some respondents noticed a sense of conflict arising between full-time academics and these temporary positions, which has eroded the social structures of their organizations.

4.3. Changing channels of communication

One topic of discussion that emerged is the changing nature of networks and new avenues of communications. Often this is a matter of necessity, as a means to ensure quality research outputs and grant applications (Allen, 2011) or private funding opportunities (Brackmann, 2015). There is also increased communication with industry, but many feel this is a top-down requirement based on a necessity to fulfill graduates' job expectations (Jankowski & Provezis, 2014). Simons and Masschelein (2009) argue that these networks have allowed academia to stay focused on the changing social and political nature of the tourism industry.

A frequent issue discussed by the participants is the need to network with other academics on a global scale. Isis (Mexico university) describes the benefits she receives from these networks when she says:

> A good thing of neoliberalism is that it pushes you to try to solve the problems you are trying to face. Bad thing is that you are alone. So, I try to develop networking with professors from other universities here in Mexico or in other parts of the world. And, of course, those are good things from neoliberalism.

Sonia (Brazil university) has started an exciting project to support a network of emerging scholars. The primary motivation for these partnerships is to maintain academic links between new researchers and seasoned academics as a way to ensure that topics, like ethics, remain at the forefront of scholarly work. Although many respondents are seeing a reduction in travel budgets, there are more technology-based opportunities to work closely with global partners, which help support SDG #10 (reduce inequality within and among countries) and #17 (strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development).

Many academics in this study also find that networking with industry has become more important within the new neoliberal paradigm. Respondents have noticed an increase in requests from communities and businesses for research-based activities, although many are assumed to be pro-bono. Sally (The Netherlands university) tells us, “There is a growing request to work closer with the tourism industry, in terms of consultancy work and projects. This can be done by integrating teaching with real-life situations, for example with internships or thesis projects”. Businesses are also playing a larger role in the governance of universities, as Rod (New Zealand university) mentions:

> They reduced the size of the university councils, so previously they would have had 20 to 25 people, with a broad spectrum of the community, students, staff, faculty, and trade unions represented. But now, they've shrunk the size of the councils, and the number of government-administered appointments has increased, so they are generally people from industry. The whole power balance within the university councils have shifted to be much more like a board of directors of a company.

In turn, many respondents notice a reduction in autonomy within their workplace (Harris, 2005), being required to serve on industry boards in order to enhance these business relationships. Moreover, industry, as a governance partner, is having more control over the curricula taught in tourism departments. There does not seem to be a reciprocal relationship, as respondents did not mention that these partnerships have helped to make industry any more sustainable or ethically inclined.

As research funding becomes scarcer or is allocated to countries with higher economic needs, academics are finding a way to navigate

and collaborate internationally within the changing research environment. This provides avenues for the transfer of knowledge globally and aligns with SDG #16 (promoting peaceful and inclusive societies). This practice has the potential to help academics in developing countries find equitable and efficient outcomes within their emerging tourism industry, specifically in countries where neoliberal policies do not yet exist and education is still the foundation of academic employment (Wilson & von der Heidt, 2013). While industry and community partnerships help keep academics grounded in solving real world problems, research outputs are focused more on best practice than theory development. As Elizabeth (Canada) aptly puts it, “They see me as an expert who can help them build a really great attraction, or design some sort of tourism program that will be a huge success”.

4.4. The role of ethics in academia

Participants were asked directly about the topic of sustainability and ethics within the culture of their program. This question was interpreted in many different ways by participants. Some looked at sustainability as a classroom concept for student learning, such as helping students to think critically and make informed decisions (Dredge et al., 2013). Others brought concepts of inclusion, diversity, work-life balance, and respect for the environment into the interview. Overall, participants demonstrated committed values in relation to sustainability in relation to the SDGs and tourism. Sonia (Brazil university) sums it up best when she says:

> I feel like my responsibility is to help (students) see the broader world that tourism is part of, to help them understand the bigger forces that shape our lives, and the way that we can practice our craft when we work in industry. To give them that context, and also to give them opportunities to reflect on their ethics and who they want to be when working in that field someday. What kind of world do they want to make in tourism?

Yet balancing real-world relevancy with the changing nature of student demands and industry influences is at the forefront of participants' concerns. Scottie (Scotland university) cautions against increased involvement of industry. He adds, “I think one of the problems is people say education should meet the industry's needs. In my experience, the industry speaks with multiple and short-term forked tongues,” which implies the opposite of long-term sustained commitment. Some participants feel that the short-term nature of industry is in stark contrast to the overarching social development objectives of both higher education and the SDGs.

One key aspect of sustainability is to design industry (and academia) based on the resources available and to ensure it is appropriate for each area. This translates into customized systems that value local strengths and overcome local weaknesses. Yet the reallocation of resources is hurting sustainability. Elizabeth (Canada university) recognizes the conundrum inherent in the neoliberalization of academia:

> We have to keep our doors open in order to live, to keep doing the work that we want to do. And that's where some of these sacrifices come in, like opening up that undergrad Introduction to Tourism course to 500 students, and sacrificing a little bit on that end, in order to get the resources we need so that a really critical fourth-year course can happen, a course that really changes student's perspectives. There's a balance there, and there's give and take, but the question of what we're sustaining, to me, really has to be about what is our work sustaining?

The question at hand is whether tourism academia is focused on sustaining the environment and people, sustaining the tourism industry, or merely sustaining academia. Bea (Ecuador university) recognizes the importance of respecting diversity, especially when educational policies are dictated from a central, often far away, governmental structure. She says:

> The (policy makers) should consider the different realities and the different necessities of the different higher education institutions somehow. We have a lot of bureaucracy and control and that kills creativity. I think there should be a balance between control, creativity, and the bottom up ideas.

Wilson and von der Heidt (2013) acknowledge that not all neoliberal changes are occurring at the institutional level. They found faculty resistance to incorporating sustainability primarily because academics were unwilling to champion for its inclusion. Therefore, as members of the academic communities, we must question how much we allow the governance system to dictate our priorities and to be conscientious as we negotiate neoliberal changes. Sally (The Netherlands university) recognizes a common value inherent in many academics:

> I often wonder why there is so little resistance on the increasing workload and lower quality job experiences. Hence, I believe that we, as academic staff, also contribute to the prevalence of a neoliberal system because most academics, including myself, are ideal neoliberal subjects. Most of us would regard ourselves as loyal, committed, and accepting individuals who are driven by self-interest, which eventually will lead to academic success. Those that fail, do so because of a lack of individual choice, problems or incompetency.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Joseph (2012) claims that academia should strive to prepare future professionals for a world that is multicultural, interdependent, and vulnerable to environmental and cultural exploitation. These fundamental challenges are being addressed through the SDGs at a global level. However, neoliberal policies within academia may present obstacles to the sustainability and success of the SDGs. Therefore, this study was inspired by the lack of research in sustainable development to adequately address the way tourism higher education has been, and will be, affected by the neoliberal changes in society. This exploratory study highlights the impact of neoliberalism on tourism curricula and the changing nature of: faculty roles, student expectations, funding allocation, and the possible influence of the tourism industry on curricula. This paper is not implying that all academic institutions face neoliberal challenges; instead, it highlights the experiences of faculty in some institutions where neoliberal changes are occurring.

Academic literature and the study participants agree that imparting CT and decision-making skills are an important role of higher education, while the nature of academia in many countries continues shifting towards the market-driven ‘entrepreneurial’ university (Allen, 2011). Mitigating the impacts of climate change, ending world poverty, and promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth require systematic changes within tourism (Wilson & von der Heidt, 2013). Academia should provide avenues to engage students with multiple ways of knowing to inform the role of the individual in society, and on a larger scale, the role of tourism as a contributor to achieving the SDGs (Dredge et al., 2013). However, as neoliberal curricula emphasize job-skills and industry training in order to address the preferences and expectations of students as customers, the relevance of education becomes a dynamic challenge. Our study suggests that neoliberalism privilege the courses that students seek rather than the courses that provide a core foundation in philosophy, theory, and critical thinking. Moreover, the influence that industry has over this curricula development has the potential to foster a culture of profit-maximization rather the achievement of global-health and wellbeing.

In these circumstances, respondents feel they are losing expert power and becoming training facilitators for acquiring industry-dictated knowledge and skills. Tourism education has a double role in, first, aiding tourism towards sustainability awareness and

transformational goals, and second, targeting quality education that instills CT. The changing channels of communication imply increasing influence from centralized power brokers and an increase in administrative tasks for professors (Brackmann, 2015; Guzmán-Valenzuela & Barnett, 2013). The results has been new collaborative partnerships, both with industry and with global research partners. However, this research suggests that these influences privileges a more uniform approach to learning that emphasizes national, global, and industry economic agendas rather than a focus on sustainability issues. This study implies that research outputs are geared more towards best-practice because of the changing nature of time-constraints (Rose & Dustin, 2009). As academics are required to engage more with industry, they are using these collaborations to fulfill research objectives. In line with Wilson and von der Heidt (2013), this study highlight a resistance by students and the complexities of the teaching environments as a barrier to sustainability agendas.

It is important to reiterate that not all participants in this study are facing neoliberal changes. In particular, our interviewees from universities in Ecuador and Turkey employ a more traditional academic system, whereas the interviewees from western universities (USA, Canada, Australia, and The Netherlands) are seeing a more pronounced emphasis on neoliberalism. This is not surprising as neoliberalism is grounded in free market economics (Harvey, 2005) and is more prevalent in the universities that are facing decreased public support. These is an underlying concern that tuition payments may not be providing universities with the same level of funding, as these universities are requiring more administrative responsibilities of faculty and more engagement with industry to advise on curricula and provide research funding. This double edged sword may not be remedied at a program of department level as neoliberal policies appear to be a necessity from a governance perspective, originating at national educational policy levels.

In order to meet the 2030 SDGs, this study concludes that tourism academics might look to Masschelein and Simons's (2009) new 'world university' profile - one that keeps the interest of the greater public at the forefront of the agenda. This university is a place of openness, dialogue, and discussion; a place that welcomes CT and the communication of ideas. Hence, building the tools to navigate the complex ideology of sustainability is vital to creating more sustainable industries and promoting a more ethical tourism development platform. Moreover, emphasis on CT skills in the classroom must be accompanied by industry skills, and students must be informed of the inherent value in CT throughout the educational process. Using research-informed teaching that emphasizes CT in real world situations can help students realize the challenges facing society and encourage sustainable business practices that also encourage tourism success.

With the increasing recognition of the need of students to be able to address the SDGs and be accountable for the social and environmental impacts of their actions, programs such as the Tourism Education Futures Initiative (TEFI) are becoming incorporated within higher education (Sheldon, Fesenmaier, Wöeber, Cooper, & Antonioli, 2008). TEFI is an inclusive tourism network, comprised of scholars and practitioners, who seek to support alternative types of tourism that are sustainable. Within this program, stewardship and CT are strong values of sustainability education (Sheldon et al., 2008). Research shows that the environmental attitudes of tourism students can be influenced through sustainability programs only if integrated throughout the curriculum, instead of being a separate component, such as a single course (Benckendorff, Moscardo, & Murphy, 2012). Therefore, academics must tie sustainability, social consciousness, and ethical business practices into each course or module throughout the student's academic career.

The primary challenges of education for sustainability lie in finding our purpose as academics - to educate, not train, to instill responsibility in students, and to prepare them as critical thinkers, while encouraging the job skills necessary for students to succeed. One could argue that many universities have successfully accomplished these goals; however, neoliberal ideologies could potentially erode the autonomy of academics and academic disciplines to balance CT with industry and student expectations. Academia should support the fundamental values of higher education in order for the future generation to uphold the SDGs. We do not know the challenges our world will face in the future. One could argue that marketable job skills change over time, however CT skills provide a basis for future professionals to adapt to industry changes and better address global challenges (Tribe, 2002). More research is needed to determine how sustainability is incorporated into curricula and to understand different pedagogies that enhance commitment to achieving the SDGs.

Limitations of the present study are seen in the selection criteria for respondents that were only full-time faculty members to the exclusion of part-time and contractual academics. In addition, the study failed to investigate whether sustainability was specifically taught in the curricula of represented tourism departments. Shedding more light into the actual content of tourism curricula could confirm or dispel participants' fears regarding the reduced role of CT skills, as well as contribute to the arguments that tourism HEIs can, indeed, influence tourism to become more sustainable and thus, support the SDGs. Moreover, a detailed cross-cultural analysis of participants' responses will provide a more sensitive picture of the different neoliberal impacts on HEIs among the various geographic regions represented in this study. Lastly, while selection bias may have played a role in the findings of this study, the data aligns with the extant literature on neoliberalism and academia.

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