

Developing and publishing interdisciplinary research: Creating dialogue, taking risks

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Published as: Lugosi, P. (2020) Developing and publishing interdisciplinary research:
Creating dialogue, taking risks. *Hospitality and Society*, 10.2.

DOI: [10.1386/hosp_00015_7](https://doi.org/10.1386/hosp_00015_7)

(Please consult the published version if citing)

Abstract

This paper discusses the practicalities of developing interdisciplinary research, identifying associated risks, challenges and opportunities. It reflects on the role of common concepts and contexts for creating intellectual contact zones between disciplinary specialists and colleagues working in applied areas of hospitality and tourism. The paper goes on to identify and evaluate different knowledge creation and publication strategies for interdisciplinary research, distinguishing between four types: provocative importation, conservative refinement, provocative exportation and radical pathmaking.

Keywords: Academic culture, Disciplines, Interdisciplinary, Multidisciplinary, Postdisciplinary, Publishing, Research, Transdisciplinary

Introduction

Interdisciplinarity provokes a variety of reactions among academics. For some it represents a constructive interaction of concepts and techniques facilitated by the transfer of knowledge from one set of practitioners and one domain of practice to another; for others, it threatens to undermine the creation of unique knowledge by specialists for distinct audiences (cf. Frodeman, Klein and Pacheco, 2010; Graff 2015; Jacobs 2014). Following Moran (2002) and Barthes (1977), interdisciplinarity is used here to refer to selective, flexible, transformative and imaginative attempts by practitioners to draw on theoretical, methodological and cultural insights from diverse specialisms to create unique, hybrid perspectives and practices; interdisciplinarity is therefore transgressive insofar as it resists the normativity of disciplines and is characterised by indeterminacy.

The open and flexible nature of interdisciplinarity suggests that those adopting these approaches are better able to integrate new conceptual or technical insights. These represent opportunities for professional and personal growth, and the development of more effective practices to help address contemporary global challenges. Furthermore,

within applied fields such as hospitality and tourism, multiple disciplines contribute to knowledge creation and curriculum development, and these subject areas have been fertile grounds for the developing inter, trans and post-disciplinary research (Coles et al. 2005, 2006, 2016; Echtner and Jamal 1997; Leiper 2000; Lynch et al. 2011; Tribe 1997, 2000). However, centrifugal forces in academia, characterised by the cross-fertilisation of knowledge, which are facilitated by the digital dissemination and consumption of information, the development of transdisciplinary, subject-based networks, and thematically-focused institutional reorganisations, are often met with centripetal ones. There are inherent risks in trying to address multiple audiences, which compromises the ability to engage any of them effectively. Contributing to applied fields rather than established disciplines may also be seen as less relevant and valued. In cultures of accounting and valuation, which uses journal quality lists and publishing metrics, interdisciplinary and applied research may be excluded or devalued (Airey, Tribe, Benckendorff and Xiao 2015; Belcher, Rasmussen, Kemshaw and Zornes 2016; Oviedo-García 2016; McKercher and Tung 2015; Tribe 2003; Tung, Law and Chon 2018). The well-documented positioning of hospitality and tourism within the context of business schools, whose objectives and valuation systems are more closely aligned with vocational training, management and employability discourses, may further disincentivize interdisciplinary work, particularly if it draws on disruptive, unconventional philosophical traditions perceived to be excessively disconnected from applied practice (Brooke and Joppe, 2017; Morrison 2018).

The merits or demerits of interdisciplinarity have been debated extensively (e.g. Jacobs 2014), but the majority of commentators agree that the discourse of interdisciplinarity is visible in policy developments, funding initiatives and the evolving management strategies of academic institutions (Lattuca 2001; Lyall and Fletcher 2013; Molas-Gallart, Rafols and Tang 2014; Sá 2008). In short, funding regimes and research practices will continue to be characterised by interdisciplinarity. Therefore, this paper discusses the practicalities of developing interdisciplinary projects, with particular reference to the risks, challenges and opportunities associated with engaging in interdisciplinary endeavours. The issues discussed here emerge in multiple fields, and the insights are therefore transferable to alternative areas of enquiry. However, the discussion is contextualised in 'hospitality' primarily because this concept is debated and applied in and across humanities, social science and applied management disciplines and fields.

Developing interdisciplinary projects

A fundamental question for any academic concerns what they seek to achieve through an interdisciplinary research project. This goes beyond the specific aim of a study; it concerns the fundamental goal of the broader endeavour. It is undoubtedly an important question for all academics, but it may have particular dimensions and connotations for those seeking to pursue an interdisciplinary agenda. Specifically, it is worth distinguishing between short and long term goals. Developing an interdisciplinary manuscript with colleagues from other disciplines may be a 'tactical' ethnographic exercise in observing and learning about the norms and practices of different disciplines. For example, how academics in the field conceptualise research and research problems, alongside fundamental issues concerning epistemological and ontological assumptions and methodologies. It is also an experiential learning exercise providing insights into how colleagues from different methodological traditions and intellectual cultures approach collaborative knowledge-generation, which may require them to compromise on

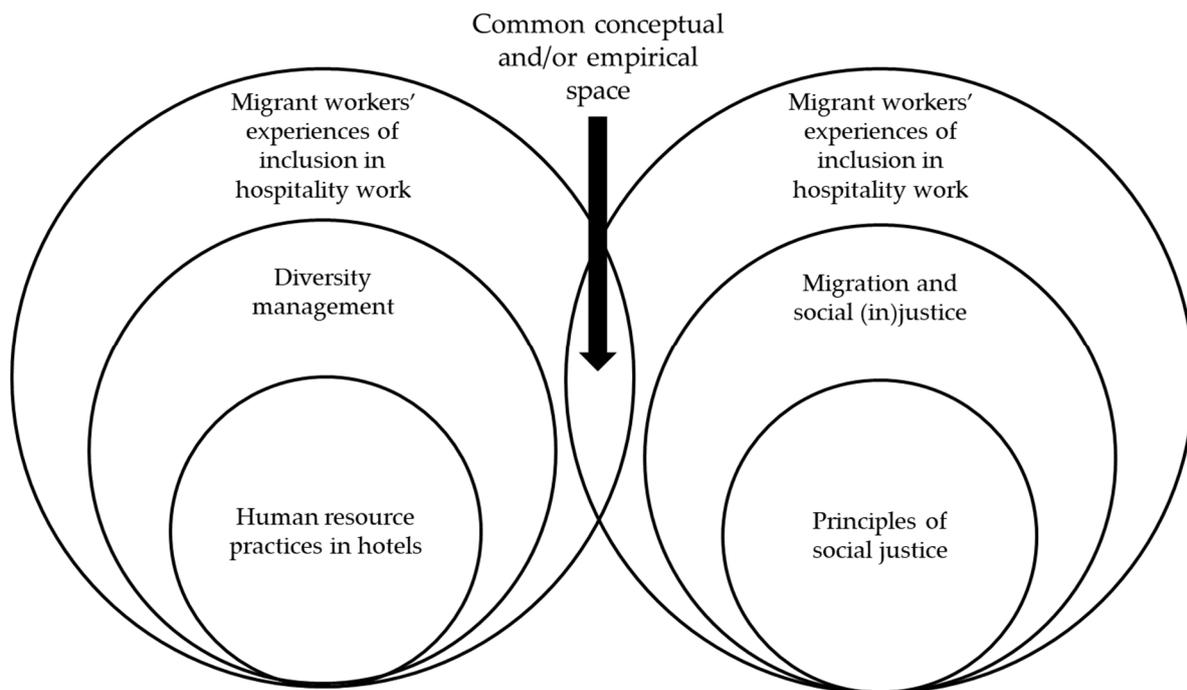
accepted practices in their own fields. The initial conversations, brainstorming exercises, the planning and construction of manuscripts are crucial for learning how to translate effectively concepts and practices across disciplines. These can also be seen as relatively low-risk, short-term social experiments that allow colleagues to test the viability of their future strategic collaborations.

Developing a manuscript alone or in collaboration can also be viewed as a crucial exercise in legitimising a novel area of research and, consequently, future cooperation. The manuscript thus acts as an intellectual signalling device, demonstrating the viability of a future line of collaborative enquiry. Consequently, the interdisciplinary manuscript should be seen not as simply as a goal, but rather as a milestone in a broader venture.

Shared space, common language

The challenge and opportunity in identifying common concepts and contexts in interdisciplinary work concerns the creation of shared zones of intellectual engagement (see Figure 1). Academics in disparate disciplines or fields may see their work as being unrelated; colleagues working in social sciences or humanities traditions may initially feel they have little in common with others working in applied areas such as business, management, hospitality or tourism. For example, as a starting point, the former may be interested in issues concerning social justice, whilst the latter might be concerned with practical challenges of developing effective human resource practices. However, a common focus on migrant workers and their experiences of employment in hospitality or tourism organisations, may offer the ‘contact zone’ where their empirical and intellectual interests overlap. Hospitality and tourism employment is often a gateway for migrants to enter the labour market; it is also a field of employment with questionable working practices where migrants regularly face discrimination and marginalisation (Baum 2015).

Figure 1. Identifying zones of interdisciplinary engagement

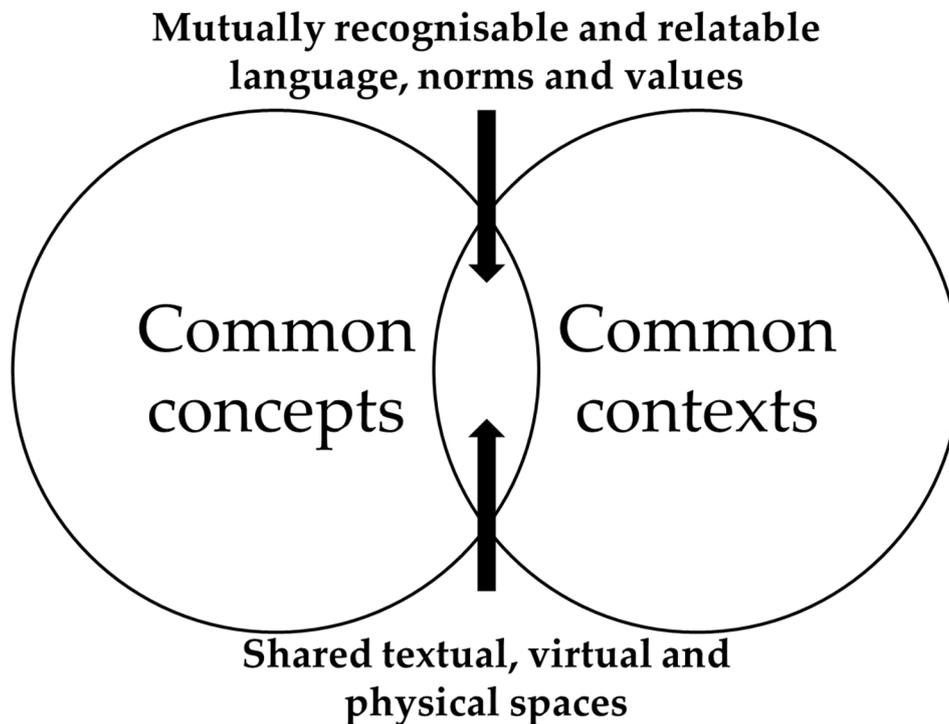


The potential to develop interdisciplinary collaborations depends on the ability to articulate interest and expertise in ways that foreground theoretical, methodological or empirical openings – enabling colleagues to position themselves in the same intellectual space. This leads on to a further set of issues concerning the facilitation of interdisciplinary dialogue: common concepts and contexts (see Figure 2.). *Common concepts* refer to the ability of actors to identify shared frames of reference alongside points of mutual interest. *Common contexts* refer to the shared spaces where actors from different disciplinary traditions come into meaningful contact.

Language is central to facilitating the identification of common concepts that can bind collaborators. A significant challenge concerns the linguistic norms of particular fields or disciplines, which reflect wider cultural value systems and practices. For example, ‘discourse’, ‘construction’, or ‘performativity’ may be just as alienating to some empirical scientists as ‘hypothesis’, ‘test’ and ‘results’ are to colleagues working in interpretative traditions. Terms such as ‘exploratory’ may be used as pejorative labels by some academics to distinguish some studies from ‘confirmatory’ and ‘predictive’ types. Individual researchers therefore have to adapt their practice, learning how to deploy terminology effectively and sensitively, whilst also accommodating the presence of potentially alien ones. The key challenge remains translation; in particular, academics’ abilities to achieve ‘recognisability’: the extent to which non-specialists understand the content and meanings of concepts; and ‘relatability’: the extent to which non-specialists appreciate how concepts are relevant to interpreting their own practices and experiences (Lugosi 2017).

A second related theme concerns common contexts, which include virtual, physical and textual spaces. Experimental collaborations and provocative, conversation-starting manuscripts may in themselves act as collaborative spaces. However, a more likely shared space for interdisciplinary research may come in the form of events outside academics’ normal intellectual area, particularly when colleagues working in applied fields such as hospitality and tourism submit and present their work at discipline-specific events, for example in mainstream sociology, anthropology or geography. The ability to identify (and occupy) common conceptual and contextual ground represent exercises in ‘academic hospitality’ (Lugosi 2016). The strange ‘other’ represents intellectual and arguably professional risks for those welcoming them and accommodating their values, norms and practices. Non-disciplinary specialists presenting their work to specialists risk provoking public criticism prompted by apparent limitations of non-specialists’ knowledge and understanding of the field. Disciplinary specialists may view non-specialists ‘discipline tourists’ as interlopers that threaten the credibility of the established field. These risks are inevitable, but rather than seeing these as reasons to avoid taking intellectual risks, they should drive non-specialists to invest in extending their disciplinary knowledge and to build their resilience to criticisms, learning from them rather than just retreating.

Figure 2: Requirements of common concepts and contexts facilitating interdisciplinary engagement



Risks and opportunities for interdisciplinary publishing

Commentators on the research and publications landscape in hospitality and tourism have highlighted the negative aspects of its current development (Beritelli, Dolnicar, Ermen and Laesser 2016; McKercher 2019; Ryan 2015; Tung and McKercher 2017). These include the rise of co-authorship to game promotional reward systems that incentivise productivity, and the development of narrowly focused research, which is easier to conduct and publish, but does little to extend existing knowledge. These trends are underpinned by methodological instrumentalism, favouring formulaic, technique-centric, quantitative studies over qualitative, longitudinal and more unconventional, conceptual research.

These publishing trends point to a number of further risks and opportunities regarding the intellectual scope, trajectory and impact of interdisciplinary research. It is possible to argue that existing research in the hospitality and tourism fields reflects what can be called 'provocative importation', where academics borrow concepts and methods from wider disciplines and apply them to the subject areas to demonstrate novelty. Such provocations can take relatively narrow, instrumental forms, when concepts from psychology or behavioural sciences are used to develop survey instruments. For example, in research examining personality traits, attitudes and behavioural intentions as antecedent, mediator or outcome variables in studies of employees and consumers (cf. Fragkogianni 2019; Ghosh and Shum 2019). Hospitality scholars often utilize sociological and anthropological concepts, for instance emotional labour, organisational culture or occupational identity, as sensitizing frameworks in conceptual and qualitative studies (e.g. Cooper, Giousmpasoglou and Marinakou 2017; Kensbock, Jennings, Bailey and Patiar 2014; Poulston 2015; Powell et al. 2019). However, provocations may be more wide-

reaching when anthropological, philosophical, sociological or geographical perspectives are used to challenge existing conceptions and boundaries of a field, in this case, of hospitality, particularly in its commercial manifestations (cf. Hay 2015; Munasinghe et al. 2017; Pritchard and Morgan 2006; Varley, Farkic and Carnicelli 2018).

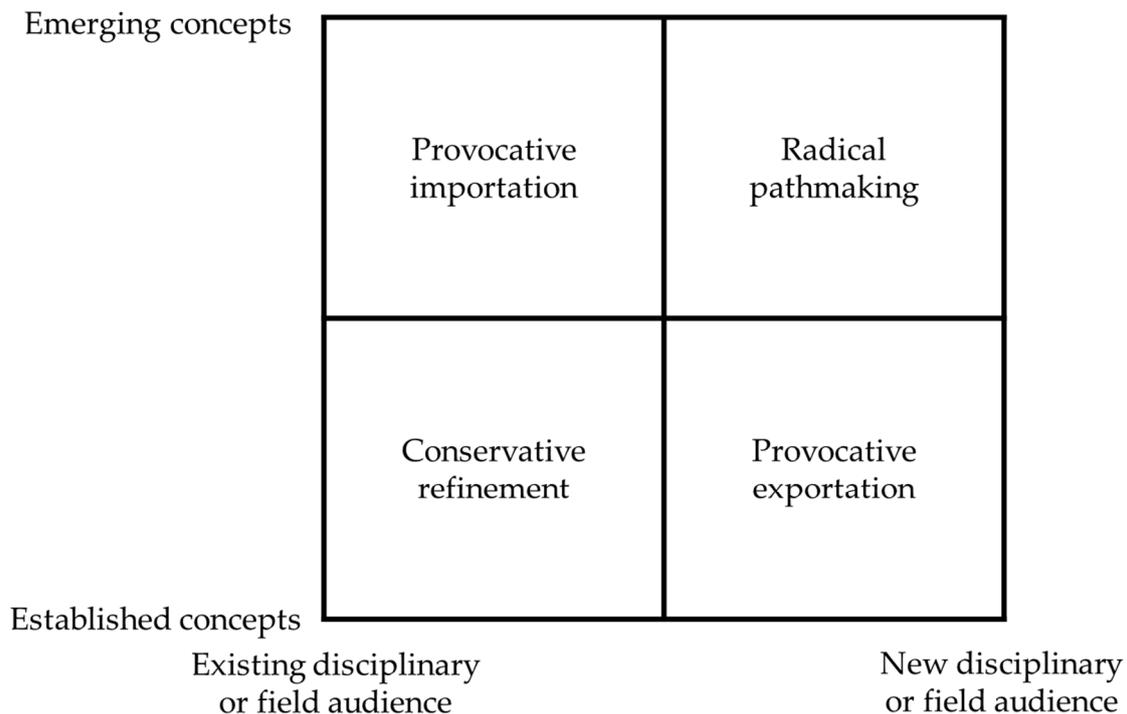
Publication norms in applied fields may also come to reflect 'conservative refinement', where well-researched concepts, for example service quality, satisfaction and loyalty are studied using conventional approaches such as cross-sectional surveys (e.g. Nunkoo, Teeroovengadum, Ringle and Sunnassee 2019; Šerić and Gil-Saura 2019). These studies may primarily be published in field and sub-field-specific outlets, thus principally targeting carefully segmented audiences, in this case within hospitality management research and education communities.

In contrast, there are opportunities to develop what can be called 'provocative exportation': taking field-specific concepts or techniques and extending their application to new disciplinary areas and audiences. For example, previous work has applied hospitality concepts and principles in studies of hospital and healthcare practices (Justesen, Gyimóthy and Mikkelsen 2014; Kelly, Losekoot and Wright-StClair 2016), hospital design (Suess and Mody 2017), funerals (Filimonau and Brown 2018; Hay 2020), organisations (Lugosi 2011, 2014), urbanity and governance, including planning scenarios (Broek Chávez and van der Rest 2014; Morton and Johnson 2019) and service sectors (Solnet et al. 2019). This work may still be published in hospitality or closely aligned outlets, such as tourism or services management. Nevertheless, these types of provocations use hospitality to construct new perspectives on practices in alternative fields.

A further and more challenging trajectory is 'radical pathmaking', which requires researchers to develop new conceptualisations, from field-specific research, for new disciplinary audiences. For example, researchers have examined how hospitality-related practices and concepts could be extended in studies of the management of non-hospitality organisations (Ford and Heaton 2001; Lugosi 2017), digital cultures (Molz 2014), occupational identities (Robinson and Baum 2020), gay and lesbian consumption communities (Lugosi 2009), parenting experiences (Lugosi et al. 2016) and urban transformation (Lugosi, Bell and Lugosi 2010). These provocations may take place in discipline-focused or field-specific outlets outside of their original fields, in this case, hospitality or tourism, thus targeting new and diverse audiences.

These four different types of knowledge generation and audiencing are summarised in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Concept trajectories and target audiences



There are inherent risks and opportunities involved in each of these strategies, especially when they are evaluated in relation to wider publication norms and pressures. It is therefore important to consider interdisciplinary publication strategies alongside the valuation cultures associated with journal rankings and the growing use of metrics in academia. Figure 4 summaries four ‘ideal types’ of publication strategy based on the perceived elite vs non-elite status of journals, i.e. those with higher rankings or indicators such as impact factors, and their specialist vs non-specialist (hospitality and tourism) focus. Figure 5 extends this by summarising the risks and opportunities associated with each of these publication strategies. The remainder of this section seeks to examine the impacts of adopting different concept trajectories for interdisciplinary research outlined in Figure 3, whilst discussing how these intersect with the publication strategies identified in Figure 4.

However, before considering these ideal types of concept trajectories and publications strategies, it is important to state certain caveats. Firstly, the extent to which any conceptualisation or disciplinary/field-specific knowledge is new or unique is debatable. New fields are constructed through paradigmatic shifts where scholars attempt to distinguish their practices from those of others (Kuhn 1996); nevertheless, fields, including hospitality and tourism, have intellectual histories that connect the knowledge and practices that define them to those of others. Therefore, it is important to remain cautious when valorising or critiquing specific works or areas of enquiry for their novelty or familiarity. Second, notions of ‘elite’/‘non-elite’ outlets are underpinned by problematic ranking practices, which often focus on narrowly defined indicators such as impact factors, rejection rates or other socially constructed value qualification. Conceptions of elite/non-elite may change over time and rankings are inevitably contested by different actors. Third, evolving socio-technological practices in data indexing and information management are transforming how journal content is accessed,

interpreted and deployed in research. Specifically, search engines, content aggregators or publishers' recommendations systems may present disparate content in close proximity, so distinctions between field-specific or elite outlets may become redundant for content consumers. Finally, the discussion considers journals rather than alternative formats such as books, monographs and emerging forms of multi-media content, therefore offering a narrower interpretation of publishing. Nevertheless, a focus on journals that are bound up in global, institutionalised valuation regimes helps to illustrate the risks and opportunities associated with one or more knowledge creation and publishing strategy.

Figure 4. Publishing strategies within and beyond the field

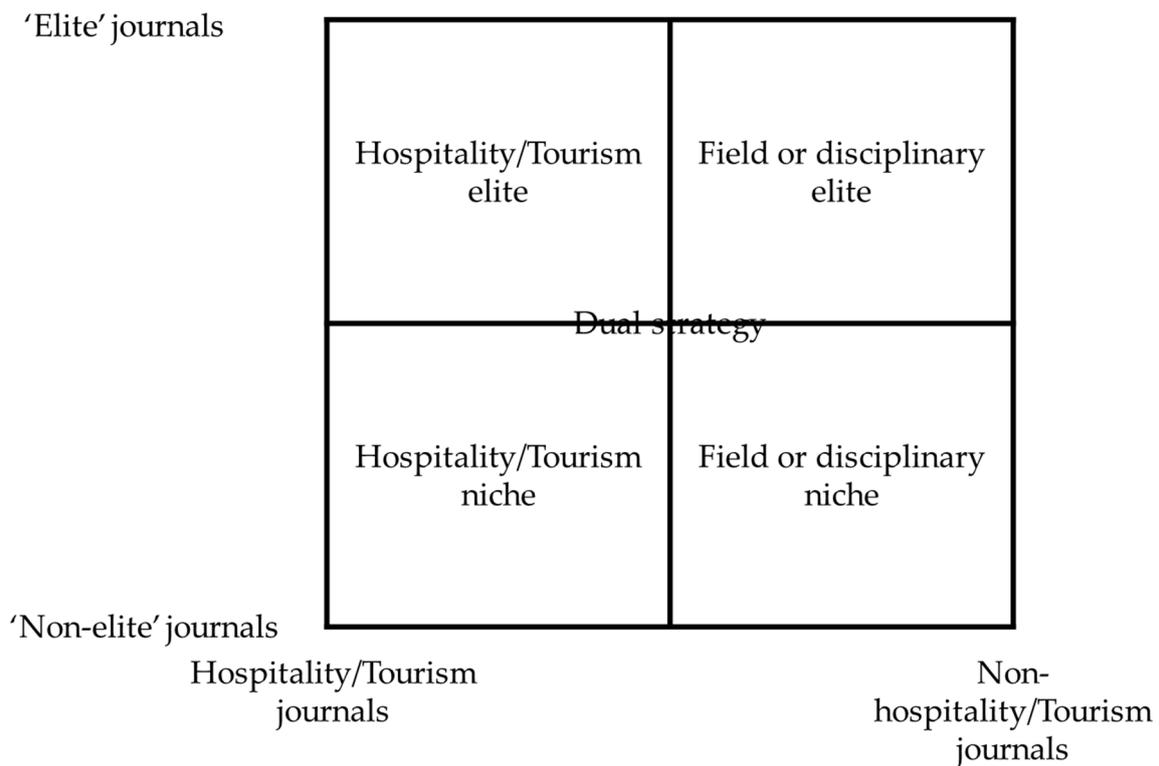


Figure 5. Implications of publishing strategies

'Elite' journals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +/-Contributing to debates in the specialised field -Publishing bottlenecks -Reinforcing status quo of publishing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Prestige and broader audiences +/-Complex, evolving knowledge requirements -Loss of hospitality/tourism focus and relevance
'Non-elite' journals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +/-Contributing to debates in the specialised field -Niche audiences -Mixed perceptions of quality and impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Broader disciplinary engagement -Other niche audiences with lower visibility amongst all -Mixed perceptions of quality and impact
	Hospitality/Tourism journals	Non-hospitality/Tourism journals

'Conservative refinement' provides opportunities for researchers to build solid bases and shared reference points for applied areas, using well-tested concepts and methodological techniques, for example concerning service quality using SERVQUAL and its derivative frameworks. It may be possible to publish works on these topics, using well-established techniques or instruments in non-elite hospitality and tourism journals. This may support cultures of subject-specific productivity that are recognised in many institutional reward and promotional systems. However, these interdisciplinary research and publication strategies risk intellectual isolation and ossification of the field (Beritelli et al. 2016).

'Provocative importation' helps to broaden the scope and focus of research, and those seeking to bring concepts and techniques from wider disciplines can demonstrate novelty for field-specific audiences, aiding publication in hospitality and tourism journals. Promoting the application of novel concepts and techniques in subject-specific fields may also enable colleagues to target elite journals in hospitality and tourism, where these may be perceived as making significant contributions to knowledge. This, however, risks the challenges highlighted by McKercher (2019) and others insofar as it places pressures on a small number of prestigious journals, their editors and reviewers, slowing down publication processes whilst perpetuating narrow conceptions of quality regarding outlet. Moreover, it reinforces the notion that hospitality and tourism are fields or empirical contexts of application rather than areas of distinction and innovation.

'Provocative exportation' and 'radical pathmaking' provide opportunities to extend the scope and impacts of work, particularly if publication strategies target discipline-specific elite or field-specific niche journals outside hospitality and tourism. However, it requires academics to identify the zones of intellectual engagement, through shared concepts and contexts. It also requires field-specific researchers to a) develop

increasingly sophisticated conceptualisations in dialogue with a more extensive body of literature; b) develop their capacity to translate their research to improve relatability and applicability, enabling non-field, disciplinary specialists to appreciate the value for them; and c) it requires resilience and an appetite for risk-taking.

'Provocative exportation' and 'radical pathmaking' involve a range of professional and psychological risks. The ability to engage meaningfully with disciplinary experts and to develop transferable concepts or techniques requires hospitality and tourism academics to immerse themselves in a wider knowledge base. It also requires them to learn and adapt their practices to the cultures of intellectual production in wider disciplines. These take time and conflict with the priorities set by the cultures of hyper-productivity evident in hospitality and tourism. 'Provocative exportation' and 'radical pathmaking' may thus curtail career progression in institutional environments that reward productivity within hospitality and tourism journals.

Senior colleagues, with established positions, may have greater freedom to experiment with riskier or slower publishing strategies than those in precarious jobs or whose careers are evolving (Morrison 2018). In these cases, they are in a privileged position to initiate disruptive creativity and support early career researchers in pursuing similar ventures. However, senior colleagues' willingness and ability to engage in provocative exportation or pathmaking may be just as affected by the resources at their disposal, their personal or professional motivations or the institutional cultures in which they work as their junior counterparts.

Publishing outside hospitality and tourism journals challenges the norms of field-specific valuation cultures, particularly if the outlets are not indexed or sufficiently highly ranked in 'journal quality guides'. There is also a risk that publications in disciplinary and niche, non-hospitality and tourism journals have less exposure or impact among discipline-specific audiences, whilst also having less visibility amongst tourism and hospitality colleagues, thus leading to a perceived dilution of specialism. In line with these critiques, some colleagues within hospitality and tourism have taken a more active stance in promoting publishing in hospitality and tourism field-specific outlets to celebrate the maturing of the field, and to maintain the vitality of the subject area (cf. Pizam 2003; Rivera and Pizam 2015; Shani and Uriely 2017).

It must also be acknowledged that interdisciplinary work may not be easy to publish and encounter resistance from editors, reviewers and disciplinary specialists. Colleagues attempting provocative exportation and radical pathmaking have to accept the possibility of being rejected, which requires higher levels of risk-appetite and considerable psychological resilience in the face of perceived failure. This, coupled with the delay in producing outputs from research, and its professional consequences, may act as disincentives to publish interdisciplinary work outside of hospitality and tourism outlets.

Finally, it is important to recognise that academics may engage with diverse disciplinary concepts, methods and communities according to specific project requirements. This may also lead to the adoption of different publications strategies according to the projects' scope, focus and output trajectory. The likelihood and feasibility of adopting dual publication strategies may be determined by researchers' capacities to maintain multiple projects and to invest in developing different outputs for (non-)discipline-specialist and (non-)elite journals. The pursuit of dual research and publication strategies will also be determined by the valuation regimes that colleagues work in, which may (or may not) recognise the merits of such endeavours.

Conclusion

Interdisciplinarity represents a series of contradictions. It remains a prominent characteristic of contemporary research and funding, reflecting cultures of dialogue and enquiry that are arguably central tenets of academic practice. However, it can also be seen as divisive, threatening to expand work pressures as colleagues have to: a) integrate disparate sets of concepts and methods; b) be prepared to engage ever-expanding audiences leading to a dilution or loss of collective identity; and c) be willing and able to traverse disciplinary cultural divides, which is likely to provoke resistance.

The response to these challenges and opportunities may simply be pragmatic, resulting in practical advice for academics on how to create contact zones, utilising shared contexts and concepts. For example, when publishing across disciplines, this may involve strategically identifying precedents set by existing scholars in a field (e.g. referencing previous works that have used similar methods, concepts, or attempted similar shifts in debates). These can be used to legitimate the adoption of certain concepts or techniques in research and to justify the submission of manuscripts by non-disciplinary specialists to discipline-specific journals. Selective use of 'relatable' terminology in titles, keywords and subject classifications when submitting to particular journals, instrumental citation of works to justify the chosen stance, and carefully crafted letters to editors can all be part of framing and priming strategies to help improve the chances of editors and reviewers accepting interdisciplinary manuscripts.

It is also possible to adopt a more philosophical response to the challenges and opportunities for interdisciplinary research outlined here. The desire to import concepts from various disciplines to augment our fields is laudable insofar as it enriches sector-specific applied research and reinforces a sense of commonality among a community of hospitality and tourism scholars. However, expanding the reach and impact of hospitality and tourism-specific work beyond our communities drives innovation, which requires creativity, resilience and rigour. Arguably, the willingness and ability to develop our individual and collective capacities also contributes to the prosperity and sustainability of our fields. Interdisciplinarity may take a number of forms, but it is likely to remain a defining feature of funding and institutional management agenda, which also affects publication practices. Therefore, the question is not whether colleagues conduct interdisciplinary work; the answer is inevitably yes. Rather, the essential questions for hospitality and tourism academics concern how they accommodate (inter, multi, trans or post) disciplinary knowledge in their own work, where and how they choose to engage in dialogue with disciplinary specialists outside their applied fields, and how they contribute to knowledge creation inside and beyond their specialist areas.

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