Ontological, epistemological and axiological issues

Johan R. Edelheim

Multidimensional Tourism Institute (MTI), University of Lapland, Rovaniemi UAS, and Lapland Tourism College, Finland

Introduction

This chapter presents the foundational components of any tourism, hospitality and event (TH&E) studies curriculum, namely the ontology, epistemology and axiology of TH&E; or, in other words, how we come to understand what the fields are, what makes us accept certain matters as being truthful and constituting knowledge, and how we establish what is valuable either for its own sake, or for something else when we negotiate what to include in a curriculum.

TH&E studies as separate academic subjects, or combined as an academic branch, can act as a field that is taught to students, an academic genre to study, and more importantly as a practice aimed at enhancing and enriching the society within which TH&E takes place. I will in this chapter refer to TH&E studies, fully conscious of the fact that studies in these sub-fields take different shapes, and are taught separately from one another at some institutions. My aim in this chapter is, however, to investigate the philosophical foundations and issues of these studies, and as they have fairly similar antecedents I will disregard the diversity they take in practice. They are dealt with here together as TH&E studies.

In taking on the task to write about ontological, epistemological and axiological issues of TH&E studies I doubt whether I will be the first person to admit that the words ontology, epistemology, and axiology always initially leave him dumbfounded. Even after nearly 15 years as an academic and having taught research methodologies for several of these years, as well as supervising several honours, Master’s and PhD candidates, I always have to go back to basics and remind myself what the concepts refer to. The reason for this is not that I do not know anything about the meanings behind the words, but maybe rather because none of the words is part of my daily vocabulary, or of what I think of as my reference frame in which I go about my work. I will, despite this, explain how the interpretations set by these concepts in actual fact make up the whole reference frame for my work, and that my daily vocabulary is very much what it is, due to them.

Ontology, epistemology, and axiology

Ontology, epistemology, and axiology lay the foundations for how we, as individuals, understand the world we live in, the determinations we make about issues relating to truth, and the matters
we consider to be of value to us individually, and to society at large. I will initially clarify the meaning of the words jointly, and will then go on to discuss each concept, and the influence it has on the way we talk about, study, and educate for TH&E.

Ontology, or the study of being, creates the framework for how we, as individuals, connected in societies, make sense of the reality in which we live. The power of ontology is that it gives us the keys to unlock the way reality is understood, by taking as its object of study the actual being of things, matters, concepts, experiences, and words – essentially of everything. Epistemology, or the study of knowledge, receives in our rationalist society more emphasis because it sets out to explain why we jointly decide that certain things are true, and others are not. Science, and the interpretation of scientific results, changes the way society acts at all stages of life. For example, ‘smoking is bad for the health’, and ‘burning fossil fuels changes our environment’ are presented as truths based on scientific research, and accepted, or not, equally based on convincing arguments that are claimed to be representing knowledge. Axiology, or the study of value or of goodness, is definitely the philosophical strain out of these three that has received least attention, even though it is fundamentally linked to our actions in our daily lives. The value of something can be seen as having intrinsic properties, valuable in its own right, or to have extrinsic properties, valuable for the sake of something else, which in turn can have intrinsic properties. Understanding what TH&E is, how knowledge is negotiated in the field, and what makes TH&E valuable and to whom, should be the prerequisites for developing any curriculum – but how often these are frankly explored, is another matter.

Ontologies of TH&E

Ontology is, as stated above, ‘the study of being’, even though etymologically it should be referred to as ousiology, because the Greek word *ousia* means ‘being’ or ‘existence’ (Barnhart, 1988: 728). Ontology should literally be the study of ‘a being’. But, that is how language works; certain meanings are assigned to certain words, and thereafter codified to be interpreted according to their accepted definition. Ontologies of TH&E refer to how we understand the existence of concepts, actions, theories, and words related to TH&E. Textbooks for TH&E studies generally start with an introductory chapter that sets the scene, describes the basics of the studies, potentially defines some foundational words and concepts, and thus creates the reality of TH&E studies that our students and peers accept as an authoritative one. No introductory chapter that I have come across has overtly stated that it aims at creating ‘the ontology of TH&E’, but that is in essence what they are doing.

Ontology is in post-positivist texts seen as describing the nature of reality (Jennings, 2010), rather than reality per se – this is to highlight that socially constructed realities can exist side by side without contradicting one another (Saukko, 2003). It is therefore important for critical theorists to ground their ontology claims in their own social reality. However, the roots of ontology reach much further back in philosophy than the modern use of it as a description of reality or realities. Aristotle referred to what we call ontology as ‘first philosophy’, ‘The philosophical study of existence or being’ (Martin, 2002: 217). The philosophical strand that has most closely taken the study of the being of things and experiences as its focus, is Phenomenology.

Central to the argument of Heidegger’s interpretation of phenomenology is the concept he named Dasein or ‘being-in-the-world’, which has a threefold structure: understanding – and an associated meaning; mood – that is, our mood has a bearing upon how we encounter the environment; and discourse – or the fact that something that can be formulated can be understood (Stumpf, 1994: 506). In his first major work, Being and Time, Heidegger proposed
that the question about Being and the meaning of Being had been investigated since the times of Plato. However, the mode of investigation had over time become confused and needed a different approach where the conventional way of addressing ontology was rejected (Heidegger, 1962). ‘The fundamental nature of Dasein is always to be in a world. World here means a context, an environment, a set of references and assignments within which any meaning is located’ (Moran, 2000: 233). Heidegger’s famous example to illustrate Dasein is of how individuals experience ‘equipment for writing, sewing, working, transportation, measurement’ (1962: 97). Heidegger suggests that a pure phenomenology without any pre-cognition does not make sense, because an object, such as a piece of equipment, does not have any properties, or an essence, that would uncover its meaning in a transcendental sense. A hammer has meaning only in terms of its intended usage, and that same hammer does not contain any traces of other tools, such as stepladders, that might be necessary to perform the acts for which the hammer is used (Stumpf, 1994). The point of thinking about TH&E ontologies through the concept of Dasein is that it gives us an actual picture of their being – how is the reality of TH&E created in the world in which TH&E students study?

Franklin (2008) suggests that TH&E academics are doing themselves an injustice in accepting an ontology of TH&E that puts them at the margins of society. Living in neoliberal societies influenced by Weberian work ethics where leisure-time and pursuits are secondary in importance to work, means that TH&E is often seen as a parenthesis in society. TH&E textbooks commonly start with a phrase like ‘tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world’, or similar for hospitality and events. This is meant to lend credibility to the topic, but is in reality diminishing the topic by creating a reality where the matter is not at the centre, but rather it is just an ‘industry’, and not even the largest one, but rather a growing one. The first sentence of these textbooks has therefore created a reality where the being of TH&E is apologized for and subordinated to matters of higher importance such as employment, income, or whatever it is compared to. Franklin suggests that tourism should be placed at centre stage because ‘tourism is not fragmented into a repetition of sites and an eternal present, but a formidable socio-technical rhizome, . . . with a series of substantial ordering effects’ (2008: 32). By ordering the being of TH&E reality differently, a different ontology is born wherein other facets of society are seen through their connection to TH&E, not TH&E’s connection to them.

**Epistemologies of TH&E**

Epistemology can etymologically be traced to the Greek word *epistēnē* – knowledge, which again comes from *epistanai* – to understand, or to know (Barnhart, 1988). Just as *Dasein* in Heidegger’s terminology refers to how the individual makes sense of being and meaning through understanding, mood and discourse (Heidegger, 1962), so in epistemology lies the explanation of how knowledge is created in our minds, and accepted in our societies. What our society refers to as knowledge and truth are results of processes of negotiation carried out amongst people considered experts in their fields. New discoveries, adjustments of old information, and best practices are all ideas dressed in convincing words and backed up with either data or logic to constitute a ‘correct’, ‘true’ position about a matter.

Belhassen and Caton (2009) divide the knowledge – the epistemology – created and used in TH&E studies into three different categories based on a linguistic framework: morphology of TH&E; new interpretations of TH&E; and problem solving of practical issues of concern to TH&E stakeholders. Their framework succinctly shows how the language we use when creating TH&E knowledge is making truth claims in different ways. The first category, the morphology or lingo, refers to how terminology is introduced to TH&E studies, often from
other disciplines, and given a meaning in TH&E literature. Examples of words and concepts that are part of the language TH&E academics nowadays use as part of their normal discourse are ‘the tourist gaze’ (Urry, 1990), or an ‘experience flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) – in both cases theoretical words commonly used in other fields describing specific phenomena. By applying these words in a tourist context they are introduced to the accepted language TH&E academics use to communicate their ideas to one another.

The second category, the new interpretations of phenomena in TH&E, highlights that different researchers perceive reality in different ways and by offering explanations that in their mind portray that reality better, new knowledge is created. The academic community internally regulates which new understandings are recognized by using peer-review processes where experts in different fields evaluate whether the new interpretations reach an acceptable level. Academics also try to promote the reliability of their views of reality by, for example, creating ranking lists for publications in which new knowledge is published, citation indices, or by other means showing the impact, and thus credibility, of their findings.

The third category, in Belhassen and Caton’s (2009) linguistic framework of TH&E epistemology, contains knowledge that is created by describing how the application of previously accepted theories and models of ‘real life’ cases enhances the operating conditions of that stakeholder’s practice. These practical applications are the most common ways of furthering TH&E epistemologies. Theoreticians use words to describe how the event, business, community, non-governmental organization, destination, or whichever stakeholder acted as the practical component, changed their practices in some way and how those new ways of acting, analysing, or understanding practical matters led to, or at least could lead to, a better functioning environment.

If ontology of TH&E is metaphorically seen as the reality into which new students of the topics are thrown by definitions of standard features in the academic fields, then epistemology acts as the measurement by which that reality is accepted as a truthful description of the real world outside academia. Both are dependent on an established common language, and an understanding of set features. These matters create the basic ingredients of TH&E curricula, but the important matter from the perspective of how curricula develop is how institutions value different kinds of understandings, and that is where the axiologies of TH&E come into focus.

**Axiologies of TH&E**

The basic premises of both Tribe’s (2002) description of Philosophic Practitioner Education (PPE), and Dredge et al.’s (2012) description of the curriculum space, lie in the balance that is needed to create a workable curriculum in TH&E, which satisfies the different learning outcomes that different stakeholders evaluate as necessary for students to have by the time they graduate. Education is generally given value for the goodness it brings to the individual who is its recipient, but even more importantly through the increased value that individual represents to the society in which they will function after the education is completed.

Different nations set different policies for how to achieve increased educational goals, and invest differently in education as a whole. Both the PPE and the curriculum space models incorporate how different stakeholders involved in the curriculum process place different values on different learning outcomes, based on what they consider being of worth to their own interest spheres. The axiology of TH&E, in terms of education, is thus created through the negotiation that takes place at the curriculum development stage. Depending on the power that stakeholders participating in the curriculum development process have in arguing for the value of specific outcomes, the curriculum space is shaped and positioned.
**TH&E studies in Kittilä, Finnish Lapland**

Finland is a nation-state in northern Europe that gained its independence in 1917 after having been under the rule of Russia since 1808, and before that under Swedish rule. The educational system bears influences from the Swedish system, but has also evolved on its own into a model nowadays benchmarked by many nations around the world. The reason for these benchmarking exercises in recent years is that international comparative studies have shown that students completing Finnish compulsory education achieve amongst the best results globally (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, undated). The reason this is noteworthy is that all education in Finland is state funded, and that very few private schools exist that would skew the results in favour of more intensive funding opportunities. Finland has always spent a comparatively large amount of its gross domestic product (GDP) on education (6.8 per cent in 2010, World Bank, 2013), and the society highly values education, and individuals’ educational achievements. Many institutions of higher education offer at least bachelor degree level studies delivered fully in English, and some are also offering Master’s degrees in English. Though, with education being state funded there is also a strong control by the Department of Education on student numbers enrolled.

Finland is geographically a relatively large nation in Europe with the eighth largest landmass, but with a comparatively small population, approximately 5.4 million inhabitants, making it the twenty-sixth largest nation in Europe (This is Finland, 2013). The northernmost region of Finland, Lapland, which this case will focus on, is geographically the largest part of Finland. Lapland makes up a third of the nation’s area, but is the home to only 3.7 per cent of the nation’s population, i.e. approximately 180,000 people. Two-thirds of Lapland’s population live in the regional centres of Rovaniemi and Kemi-Tornio, with the remainder spread out in 20 local councils. One of these is located in the north-west of Lapland in the fell district called Kittilä (Lapin liitto, 2009).

Lapland’s, as well as Kittilä’s, modern history of employment and population change is a story of a society moving rapidly from agrarian roots to the experience society. Lapland’s population grew quickly during the early 1900s, reaching 108,000 by 1940, 170,000 by 1950, and a peak of 221,000 inhabitants in 1967 (Lapin liitto, 2009; Pennanen & Hirttiö, 1992). This growth followed the independent nation’s land policies where state-owned land was put to active use through agriculture, forestry, and infrastructure projects capitalizing on water power. Societal changes in the late 1960s and early 1970s resulted in a major exodus of the younger population to the south of Finland and to Sweden to get jobs in factories (Lassila, 2001). The population remained, thanks to state investments, relatively stable at approximately 200,000 between 1970 and 1997 when, in connection with a financial slump, the Finnish state was forced to cut down on subventions to regional areas. The population in Lapland has since decreased steadily to the current 183,000, and until recently the only growing regions were the regional urban centres. Kittilä grew in a similar pattern to the rest of Lapland until the early 1970s when there were 7,200 inhabitants. The following 30 years saw that number decrease to 5,800 in 2002 (Lapin liitto, 2009). Thereafter, Kittilä has been one of the few regional councils to experience a population increase – in 2012 there were approximately 6,400 inhabitants (Kittilän kylät, 2013).

From the early 1900s to the 1980s, Kittilä’s population’s major sources of income were agriculture and forestry. This is reflected in the fact that as early as 1910 the state set up the first agriculture school, Kittilän maatalousoppilaitos (Arkistolaitos, 2013). Kittilä was also one of the first districts in Lapland with budding tourism and hospitality enterprises when accommodation and transport were offered to leisure travellers coming to trek and to ski in the fell-area surrounding the district’s highest peak Levi (Lassila, 2001). In the reconstruction of the
infrastructure after the Second World War, during which a majority of the region’s buildings had been destroyed, it was decided that girls’ vocational education would be separated from the agriculture school into a ‘home economy’ school, Kittilän kotitalouskoulu. This was active from 1947 to 1953 (Arkistolaitos, undated). A new building in the centre of the district was erected in 1954 and the school was named Kittilän emäntäkoulu – the Kittilä Matron School, which was active until 1987, after which it was renamed Kittilän kotitalousoppilaitos – Kittilä Home Economy Institute (Levi.NYT, 2009). The educational focus of the school started evolving in the early 1970s with a move away from its agricultural matron-roots towards a stronger focus on preparing students for careers in production kitchens. The school was merged with the agriculture school in 1992 and renamed Kittilän maaseutuammattien oppilaitos – Kittilä School of Agricultural Professions, but went through yet another change in 1999 when it changed its focus into hospitality and tourism, and its name to Levi-Instituutti (Levi.NYT, 2009).

The education offered in Kittilä had up to that point been focused on secondary education, but from 1999 onwards there were also opportunities for students to enrol in multimode higher education degrees through Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences (UAS). By 2006 Levi-Instituutti was incorporated into Lapin Matkailuoppilaitos – Lapland Tourism College, with campuses in two other districts. This offered diplomas in hospitality, tourism and leisure. The most recent change occurred in 2010 when the college joined Matkailualan tutkimus- ja koulutusinstituutti – the Multidimensional Tourism Institute (MTI), which is an institute that coordinates TH&E education at all post-compulsory levels as well as TH&E research in all of Lapland. The education offered at MTI comes through its partner institutions: Lapland Tourism College, vocational secondary education; Rovaniemi UAS, applied hospitality and tourism education at bachelor and Master’s levels; and University of Lapland, major in tourism studies as a part of social sciences at bachelor, Master’s, and doctorate levels. Students at MTI are enrolled, and eventually graduate, from the institutions offering the separate diplomas and degrees, but have, through their studies, opportunities to select learning modules offered at the other institutions, as well as to participate in project studies where student groups from different educational modes study together. The different degrees and diplomas are not seen in a hierarchical sense as being at different levels, but rather as being different necessary dimensions of TH&E industries, which are offered at a multidimensional institute.

By looking at the development of education in Kittilä certain trends, especially in the axiologies of TH&E, can be distinguished. Nation-states fund education that is considered to be of value to the society. In the early stages of Finland’s history the focus was on basic education, vocational education related to agriculture nationwide, and on university education in two cities in the south of the country. Societal changes took place in Finland during the rebuilding stage after the Second World War due to the loss of almost a full generation of men in the war. Women were needed to join the workforce to a larger extent and this led to the development of educational institutions that would prepare women to carry a larger role in managing their households, such as the Kittilä Home Economy School, founded in 1947. The impact of the post-war baby boom meant a further adjustment in society, and thus also education. A more equal number of men and women went on from compulsory education to further studies, but with conservative values still reigning, women were given alternatives that would capitalize on ‘female traits’. Post-secondary education started being available more widely, with health-care schools, teachers’, and technical colleges established in regional areas. An example of this was the Kittilä Matron School founded in 1954, where girls aged from 16 to 20 learned the work of an agricultural matron in charge of a farm, or later, when the society was undergoing a turn towards a stronger emphasis on industrialization in the early 1970s, focused on operational and supervisory positions in production kitchens.
The downturn in agriculture and forestry paved the way for a stronger emphasis on service professions. Vocational education in Kittilä was aimed at servicing agricultural professions, but later changed into hospitality when the community came to depend more on service industries (ELY, 2011). The 1970s and 1980s brought about further educational changes when the higher education sector expanded, with universities created in several regional capitals, and the former separate colleges being merged and centralized also to regional capitals. A reform in the post-secondary education in the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the demerger of higher education courses from vocational schools and the creation of polytechnic universities, or in Finnish terms universities of applied science (UAS) (Helakorpi, 2007). Lapland got its own university in 1979 with its home in Rovaniemi. This was the only Finnish university given the right to offer tourism as a major in their social sciences faculty (Ylä-Kotola, undated), and UAS institutions were created in both Rovaniemi and in Kemi-Tornio.

Hospitality and later tourism education at a supervisory level had from the 1960s been offered at only one institution in the south of the country (Haaga Yhtymä, 2013), but came, through the larger changes in the sector, to be part of the UAS repertoire with bachelor degrees offered at 15 different institutions, amongst them in Rovaniemi. University TH&E education is still only offered as a major at the University of Lapland, but other Finnish universities have developed a network of TH&E courses so that students at participating universities are offered a chance to choose tourism as a minor together with majors in related fields, such as geography or business. The value given to TH&E as fields of development and employment grew in Lapland as transport links were improved and money was invested in accommodation facilities and leisure activities. Youth education was mostly offered only on campus, but together with expectations of lifelong learning, UAS adult education brought about more flexibility. Therefore, students in Kittilä could start studying bachelor programmes in hospitality management at Levi-Instituutti in combination with Rovaniemi UAS in the early 2000s. However, this option was later discontinued as a means of saving money that was spent on teachers’ transport and accommodation between Rovaniemi and Kittilä (150km), leaving students from the Kittilä region again with on-campus vocational education on offer locally.

The curriculum space framework’s force field(s) applied on MTI

The latest developments in TH&E education in Kittilä come through courses created through MTI’s project pedagogy where student groups from vocational education, UAS degrees, and university degrees are jointly involved in events in the community. MTI participates in events at different places around Lapland, one of these being an annual theatre festival in Kittilä. During the event, students from the different study groups receive different tasks, from practical operational tasks for vocational students, supervisory tasks for UAS students, and planning and development tasks for university students. The assessable items for the projects also differ for students from the different groups so that they fulfil the expectations of set curricula at each institution. Students from the vocational group of MTI need to demonstrate skills and competences achieved, students from the UAS do reflective pieces that underline how theories have been applied, or could have been applied at the event, and students from the university write reports that evaluate the event and plan how it could be enhanced in the future.

An important part of Dredge et al.’s Curriculum Space Framework (2012) is the notion of a ‘force field’ in the TH&E curricula. This force field relates to the internal and external influences that shape the curricula at different institutions. By accepting that each curriculum is a negotiated compromise where a multitude of different stakeholders’ perceptions of necessary learning outcomes are collected, it is easy to perceive a curriculum as having been formed by different
forces. The key challenge in the Curriculum Space Framework is that institutions generally have to solve how to form their curriculum alone, and are thus forced to make strategic choices on what is included, and what is not, based on the institution’s size and resources. A possible solution to this dilemma is offered to institutions that are not trying to do this on their own, but rather combine forces with likeminded institutions and together offer separate curricula to satisfy different stakeholders more broadly, whilst cooperating internally where practical.

MTI was established in 2009 through the combination of TH&E education and research from three separate educational dimensions. Educational institutions in Lapland grapple with the challenge of serving a large geographical area with few inhabitants and an active and growing TH&E sector. The institutions stay separate, each fulfilling their own role in society, and each working according to their own set of rules and laws that govern how they may act, and what they may do. The institutions offer degrees and diplomas that aim to satisfy different outcomes in society and carry out their own student recruitment and administration. By agreeing to cooperate in the fields of TH&E each is allowed to concentrate on a smaller sector of the curriculum space, and the compromises that need to be made are easier to negotiate when certain tasks and roles can be handed to another educational dimension; see Figure 3.1 for an illustration of MTI’s possible force fields.

Students enrolling in the programmes offered at the institutions always concentrate on just their own award and there is no objective to reduce the administrative lines between the separate institutions. The metaphor MTI uses is that it creates a fruit salad of TH&E education, each component still clearly distinguishable in the whole, but tasting better through complementing

![Figure 3.1 MTI’s possible force fields within the curriculum space framework](image-url)

Source: Adapted from Dredge et al. (2012: 2167).
other fruits. This is in contrast to the often used metaphor of a melting pot, because it conjures up images of distinct features being absorbed into a standardized mass where none of the initial ingredients exists in its original form.

The reason MTI wants to be seen as a fruit salad is exactly because of the forces active in the curriculum space. Students wanting, for example, to become executive chefs need to be trained in skills and competences offered by kitchen specialists, so that they can satisfy the industry they are heading to. But as no individual is exactly the same, some might want to learn about finance too, in order to know how to become a self-employed restaurateur, while others might want to learn about event catering, and so on. For students selecting courses offered at another institution credits are transferred to the diploma or degree programme that they are taking across MTI, and if they at a later stage decide to continue their education in one of the other dimensions then they will be able to get advanced standing for units already completed.

MTI was created in an environment before radical changes had started to take place in Finnish TH&E higher education, but now as those macro-changes start to make themselves known it is becoming all the more logical to carry on with the cooperation. With funding models that are encouraging shorter study times, cooperations like this would seem to be a useful way to progress.

Impacts on Finnish TH&E education from changes in the macro-environment

All education leading to an award is state funded in Finland, and thus also state regulated in terms of numbers of students being allowed to enrol in different degrees each year, and available degrees at different institutions. After having allowed the higher education field to expand rather continuously from the early 1970s until the early 2000s to provide the citizens of the nation, as well as foreign nationals, opportunities to gain higher education in fields considered necessary for society, recent years have provided quite a change. The demographics of Finland have changed with fewer children being born, and the previously decided numbers of degrees offered at different institutions are argued to be too large.

A simultaneous process has been the increased urbanization which has depleted some areas of the country of their school-aged population, and given especially the south of the country a much denser population. Beyond the nation, Finland is a member state of the European Union, and changes that have been brought about by the Bologna Process and the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), as well as by the Tuning (2010) project creating a joint European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (see Chapter 1), have lately had a great impact on Finnish higher education institutions.

The legislation for universities was initially changed to assure them the same autonomy as other universities in EHEA, but in order to maintain control over the universities a new funding model was developed and implemented in 2012 (Narikka & Nurmi, 2013), and subsequently in 2014 for UAS institutions. The three cycles of higher education (bachelor, Master’s, and doctorate degrees) described in the Bologna documents meant that Finnish universities and UAS institutions suddenly seemed to be on a level playing field, at least from an international perspective. The development of the dual model of higher education in Finland was aimed at providing different educational pathways for students aiming for different industries, but suddenly this dual model did not work due to changes in the macro-environment (Helakorpi, 2007). A subsequent change to the UAS sector was undertaken where available degree numbers were decreased radically, for example 38 per cent of TH&E degrees were discontinued nationally with some UAS’s losing the right to offer TH&E degrees altogether.
The funding models for universities and UAS institutions differ significantly, with the former given a more expressly academic role, and the latter a stronger focus on teaching and community engagement. University funding is based on performance on a number of indicators within which average percentages of students reaching 55 credits per year, candidate, Master’s and doctorate degrees completed, and other teaching-related matters carry almost similar weightings to the number of peer-reviewed publications and competitive grants and other research-related matters. By contrast, UAS funding is geared to teaching-related matters for 85 per cent with community engagement or industry-related grants making up the most of the remainder (Narikka & Nurmi, 2013).

These changes in the macro-environment have naturally also had an influence on the TH&E curricula on offer in Finland, just like in the rest of the world. Some UAS institutions have merged their former TH&E department with, for example, business studies, and continue to have some courses from the former curricula on offer, but other places have strategically decided to just teach out current students and thereafter discontinue these areas of study. The epistemology of TH&E in Finnish higher education is therefore shrinking with fewer courses on offer, fewer topic-specific academics and thus fewer industry-driven projects coordinated within the UAS by people who are familiar with the international research field. The ontology of TH&E being on the margins of society has definitely not helped TH&E academics to build a case for their courses.

But central to all of these macro-changes is what appears to be a lessening of the value given to TH&E studies in society, and through that amongst potential students. TH&E continues to be a marginal field without an overtly intrinsic value for the nation. Leisure time is valued as important to individuals, and thus indirectly to society as it provides people with opportunities to regenerate so that they can return refreshed and productive to work. TH&E is valued for providing employment opportunities, but is criticized for being full of lowly paid jobs. TH&E is valued for the positive impacts it can have on regenerating a region’s culture, or for the opportunity it brings to capitalize on natural values, but is equally criticized for potential negative impacts it has on all sectors it is in contact with (Jafari, 2005). The global requirements placed on academics to produce more peer-reviewed material that seldom, if ever, is consumed by the industries to which it relates and seldom, if ever, is read by political decision makers, mean that the value of the field of TH&E academia might diminish even more. TH&E industry actors hire consultants with education in other fields to advise them on matters that TH&E academics study, and politicians listen first to experts in the fields TH&E is related to because they are seen as overarching matters in which TH&E are only components. One could claim that TH&E in academia is at a crossroads where the next actions will determine how it is valued in the future, and thus in which direction it will continue to develop.

Product life cycle of TH&E studies

One way of picturing the development of TH&E education is by analysing it through the help of a lifecycle model, such as the Destination Lifecycle model (Butler, 1980). TH&E studies in academia have over the last 40 years gone through the different stages that can be likened to a product life cycle starting with:

- ‘Development’ of higher education (HE) studies, based in many cases on earlier vocational studies, or as minor subjects offered in conjunction with a related major. Published research during this stage happened in journals focusing on other issues and TH&E was generally the empirical case environment in which the theories of the other discipline were applied.
• ‘Introduction’ of TH&E studies in select universities across the world with very few competing offerings. The degrees were often taught by academics educated in another discipline but establishing a new field based on their personal interests. The first TH&E-specific journals were established and an eclectic mix of research was accepted in them based on the disciplines in which the researchers were educated (Jafari, 2003), but from an epistemological perspective also depending on the field peer-reviewers were familiar with and thus willing to accept as truthful descriptions of reality in the new field (Belhassen & Caton, 2009).

• In the ‘Growth’ stage there was a flurry of new TH&E degrees established at universities, as well as a first clear diversification of TH&E into separate tourism, hospitality and, somewhat later, event degrees. Traditional universities rarely took on these new degrees, but in countries with a large component of funding coming from tuition fees, cooperations were created where private providers could offer TH&E programmes with the degrees being validated through cooperation with a university in return for royalties for all enrolled students (Jafari, 2003). The first academics educated within the field started to work at universities and teach the now more established field to growing classes of students. Research journals followed a similar growth with a multitude of ever more specific titles being published to cater for the academics active in all the new degree programmes.

• ‘Maturity’ is reached at the stage when no new degrees and no new research journals are being established. At the maturity stage the emphasis is placed on consolidating brand reputation, getting certificates of quality assurance, and more highlighted differentiation.

• ‘Decline’ or rejuvenation is the stage where some competitors start to withdraw from the field because there is not enough demand for the available products. Some try to rejuvenate their offering by rebranding it, or by consolidating several earlier separate degrees into one. TH&E academics might move on to other disciplines that are offering more secure employment and others are hedging their bets by publishing their research in several disciplines’ journals to stay relevant to a larger audience.

The downfall of product lifecycle models is that they are weak tools for making predictions. It is seldom possible to forecast how long different stages will last, and proactive decisions are thus challenging. However, the model’s value is in its simplicity and in the clearly developed strategies for the different stages. A manager in the TH&E academic world can estimate where their offering is on the product life cycle, and can thereafter adjust the communication with different stakeholders to maximize the achieved value.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the being – ontology, the knowledge – epistemology, and the value – axiology, of TH&E studies by investigating the philosophical underpinnings of what these studies are: what sort of reality TH&E students and academics are thrown into; and how they understand that reality based on how it is presented to them. The way knowledge is created is also discussed and through that measurements for what the TH&E community consider to be true are established. Finally the value of TH&E is discussed and through that implications for curriculum development based on these foundations.

The empirical case of the chapter is an analysis of the development of TH&E education in Kittilä, Finnish Lapland, to highlight how curricula are shaped by factors in society. The case shows that TH&E education has followed the society’s development from an agrarian economy, through industrial times towards a service, and ultimately an experience economy. The education
offered has changed based on what society values, and how society sees its own reality and future. The empirical section continued by linking TH&E education in Kittilä with the Multidimensional Tourism Institute (MTI), a cooperation between three different educational dimensions: university, university of applied science, and vocational education. MTI was used to show how cooperating institutions might be able to reduce the challenge posed by the competing interests of stakeholders.

The final part of the chapter introduces macro-changes to TH&E education in Finland, though they are almost global. This section retraces the importance of paying attention to ontologies, epistemologies and axiologies of TH&E because they form the way the field is perceived, and thus also shape decisions made about education in the field. A final analysis of where TH&E education lies on a product life cycle finds that maturity might have been reached in many cases, and some signs of decline and rejuvenation are also in the air. The product lifecycle analysis is aimed at creating debate about how TH&E studies are to prepare for the future to ensure that the discipline is rejuvenated based on strong foundations, rather than allowing it to go into an uninformed decline.

References


