

UN Tourism Ulysses Prize Award Ceremony (17th Edition)

University of Technology Sydney

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Laureate's Address

I am greatly honoured to have received the Ulysses Prize, 2025. I wish to thank the group of existing Ulysses Laureates for their support, and also the organisers of this event today, both from UN Tourism and from the University of Technology Sydney. Rather than an individual honour, I see this award as the result of a shared enterprise given the wonderful support that I have received from my family and numerous colleagues over the course of my career. I will not name names here but they know who they are, and know that I could not have won this lifetime achievement award without their ongoing support.

I came to tourism research rather late, having previously published some papers in philosophy, economics and technology management journals. I acted strategically in selecting tourism economics as my area of research. I thought that it promised interesting research and policy challenges and would comprise more interesting content and characters than many of the mainstream topics of economics research. As it turned out, I was right on both counts.

My first foray into the tourism field was as part of a research team associated with the National Centre for Development Studies at ANU. The overall project involved an overview studies of major industries in the economies of the South Pacific, particularly, Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, Samoa and the Solomon Islands.

My overview of tourism development in these countries was well received, and I was funded to do follow up research involving a field trip to each. This study focussed on

the extent of leakages of tourism revenues from these economies that limited the overall economic contribution made by tourism. The results guided policy in these countries to enhance the benefits from tourism growth.

Soon after this, the Federal Ministry of Tourism commissioned a study on the impacts of Foreign Direct Investment on the Australian tourism industry, an issue that was causing growing protest at the time especially in Queensland. The study required field study in North Queensland. The study was published by the then Bureau of Tourism Research, the research arm of the former Australian Ministry of Tourism and disseminated to major players in the tourism industry. My involvement in tourism research, involving travel, strengthened my desire to focus on tourism study for the remainder of my career.

In 2002, I was appointed Qantas Professor of Travel and Tourism at the University of NSW. This was an internationally advertised research chair, involved in the newly established Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre, based on Government, Industry and Academic sponsorship and liaison. I became part of a team that addressed economic policy and research pertaining to tourism.

Much of our work soon became internationally recognised. Let me give you an idea of the range of the research activity. Just some examples:

- Development of Tourism Satellite Accounts for Australia and each of its states. These provided, for the first time, accurate information on Tourism's contribution to the Australian economy, by way of income, value added and employment.
- Using TSA to define tourism industry boundaries, we estimated the carbon footprint of Australian tourism, a pathbreaking study linking economic and environmental data.
- Determinants of the competitiveness of tourism destinations, including initial estimates of tourism industry productivity. The project was jointly funded by the tourism Ministries of Australia and Korea. The resulting destination competitiveness framework has been adopted globally and has spawned many tourism PhD theses, applying the framework to their home countries.
- Development of models to determine the economic contributions of specific tourism sectors such as MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions and events), cruise tourism and special events.

- In these studies we found that the standard mainstream methods of measurement greatly exaggerated the economic contribution of each of these sectors.
- We also developed frameworks for estimating the economic impacts of tourism crises such as SARS, the Global Financial Crisis and the COVID 19 pandemic. These studies involved using our models in reverse, starting with reductions in tourism demand.
- The models that we used allowed estimation of the interactive effects between tourism and other industries. Thus while an expansion of tourism might lead to increased income and employment in certain industry sectors, it would also draw resources away from other industries, resulting in income and employment losses elsewhere in the economy. These crowding out effects reduce the net benefits of tourism growth.
Of course, tourism industry stakeholders did not want to hear this, but journal editors and our fellow researchers were certainly interested in such effects.
- Measures of tourism yield, comparing the economic impacts of big spenders with the adverse environmental effects generated by their additional consumption.
- Effects of tourism's carbon footprint on climate change and effects of climate change on tourism demand in aggregate, and by destination.
- Enablers of sustainable destination development, a complex dynamic concept relating to people, planet and profits

During this time, I was attending numerous tourism conferences and workshops worldwide. This provided a wonderful interaction for sightseeing and recreation in exotic lands and some understanding of other cultures (although tourism conferences tended to be held in a culture free bubble). Anyway, I was very happy with my choice of career.

I became more involved in international tourism research activity, as elected Fellow of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism and one of the founding fathers of the International Association of Tourism Economics, and Business Enterprises for

Sustainable Tourism Network, holding leadership positions in each. I was appointed a foundation fellow of the Council of Australasian University Tourism and Hospitality Educators and Researchers (CAUTHE).

I also served as economic advisor to a UN Tourism team to develop a tourism strategy for Andhra Pradesh, and was lead author of a report on the competitiveness of coastal and marine tourism in Europe, commissioned by the OECD. I also found time to co-author the book *Tourism Economics and Policy*, which remains the most prominent textbook in the field.

I would now like to share with you some concluding thoughts on how my views have evolved more recently.

I now see much of my work on the economic contribution of tourism as inherently 'boosterist', embedded in a neoliberal pro-growth mindset. In the early days of my career, economic impacts were seen as of overriding importance. While social and environmental impacts were acknowledged, they tended to be marginalised in the research and consulting effort. In economic jargon such effects are referred to as 'externalities'.

Two approaches to tourism development are gaining prominence in the research literature, both of which highlight failures in the content and direction of tourism economics. My recent papers align with both approaches.

The first approach emphasises the importance of estimating resident well-being outcomes in assessing alternative paths of tourism development.

Historically, wellbeing issues have been relatively neglected within tourism research and policy.

However, there is widespread agreement in the social science literature that the ultimate objective of public policy is human wellbeing, present and future. Well-being assessment is progressively moving towards the development of internationally comparable measures to better understand people's lives at the individual, household and community level.

In a suite of recent papers, I have argued that tourism research and destination management should incorporate stakeholder wellbeing outcomes associated with tourism development into conceptual analysis, policy intervention and assessment, in an integrated way. I have argued that the estimated impacts of tourism development should be subjected to a wellbeing lens which acts as a prism or filter to convert physical and monetary impact measures into stakeholder wellbeing outcomes. Through this strategy, wellbeing measures can be used to gauge progress in tourism sustainable development.

My research in this area adopts a wider social science perspective aligning with content in Ecological and Behavioural Economics. Unless tourism economists adopt or develop the types of wellbeing measures employed by policy makers, their findings will have little relevance to the wider public debates on appropriate resource allocation to enhance social well-being.

The second approach has emerged from dissatisfaction with the standard growth-oriented approach to tourism development.

Despite growing awareness of the negative impacts of economic growth, by way of carbon emissions, pollution, reduced biodiversity, resource depletion, stressful lifestyles and inequalities in wealth and income, tourism growth remains a priority for the majority of destination managers and researchers.

Globally, tourism destinations have adopted a growth management approach- that environmental harm can be mitigated through technological innovation and improved efficiency. UN Tourism explicitly upholds the growth management approach, expressing the view that 'growth is not the problem, it is how it is managed'.

My view, and that of an increasing number of critics is that growth is indeed the problem. Despite lots of good industry intentions, things are NOT getting better. Along with other critics I have recently argued that strategies aiming to increase *efficiency* in production must be complemented by the pursuit of *sufficiency* that is, the direct downscaling of economic production in selected sectors alongside with corresponding reduction of consumption.

Unfortunately, little formal or empirical work has been undertaken by tourism economists to estimate the likely outcomes of policy initiatives to 'resize' tourism. Tourism economics has the potential to substantially inform research on the ideal characteristics of a re-sized tourism industry, that incorporates wellbeing measures into private and public sector policymaking. Of course, few tourism industry stakeholders want to talk about 'degrowth' let alone fund research to support it. But this does not diminish the importance of the task ahead.

I have delivered many invited addresses to industry workshops and university classes workshops. I have always accepted invitations from colleagues worldwide to address their students. Before one lecture to students, I was introduced by the Professor as a 'famous' tourism scholar'. After delivering my talk, a serious looking student approached me and said 'The professor said you are very famous, but I do not think that you are'. He was right of course. We tourism researchers swim in a small pond. But we try our best to navigate the waters. Most of us, but not all, try not to take ourselves too seriously. We are not about curing cancer or solving the Middle East crisis, but our subject matter still has some importance to affect quality of life on the planet. And besides - - - I've been having fun along the way.

Thank you very much for your attendance here today.