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Complexity of tourist safety in the Arctic: stakeholder's knowledge co-production

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1. Introduction

In light of growing demand on tourism in the Arctic, it is imperative to strengthen the knowledge base, skill set and competencies of the tourism labour force by strengthening tour guide professionalism and safety in the region. Complex logistics, rapidly changing weather, and remoteness, as we as the effects of climate change play significant role in field practices, especially for tour operators in the Arctic. With growing interest in the region, the likehood of accidents increases, leading to stress on limited local emergency services. Recent findings show that local knowledge, experience and training have been recognized as essential in ensuring safety Hild at al.,2022) while there is limited data on knowledge exchange between local stakeholders. Knowledge on relationship and interaction between the stakeholders, such as tourism boards, rescue services, academia, tour guiding schools and guiding companies is essential in the coproduction of knowledge; phenomena of ensuring tourist's safety in the Arctic. The objectives of this research are twofold: (1) to explore current state of safety- related knowledge and (2) to map recourses for fostering collaboration between practitioners, theorists, researchers, educators, company owners, government representative and tour guides.

By exploring stakeholder's capacity and standpoints related to issues on safety tourists operations, we seek to explore the possible ways to collaborate in knowledge co-production, with focus on enhancing tour guides education. Hence, our study sought to address literature gaps by examining:

1) What are the safety concerns related to extreme weather events for stakeholders operating in the Arctic environment?
2) What is the current state of safety-related knowledge exchange between the rescue services and tourist companies?
3) What strategies and resources are needed to establish collaboration between the rescue services, tourist companies, and guiding schools in the Arctic?

The research contributes to the knowledge of tourism management in the safety field, giving insights into a process of potential collaboration in the Arctic, building resilient infrastructure, promoting knowledge sharing and enhancing safety practices, while addressing the importance of cooperation of various stakeholders, including research, and local communities in tourism destination development in the polar regions.

2. Tourists' safety in the Arctic

Extending the tourism seasons, together with increased accessibly to new locations, as a results of climate change pose thread to the commercial operations and tourist safety. The exposure to new hazards, such as extreme weather events or changes within the existing visited sides (such as moving glaciers, new crevasses, unstable sea ice) becomes a challenge for guides and tour operators. With limited regulations and standards on operating land-based tourism activities, such as certification or mandatory training for tour guides, there is inconsistency in approaching

tourist safety as shared responsibility of guides, educators, company owners and policy-makers. While factors, such as harsh climate conditions, remoteness, limited infrastructure, climate change and lack of data and knowledge are considered as fundamental in operational safety (Albrechtsen & Indreiten, 2021), it is imperative to explore how tourism stakeholders approach safety concerns.

Research shows that tour guides have responsibility of ensuring tourist safety. Guides training as an imperative for development of safety competencies (Hild at al.,2022) should be developed in the dialog between theorists, researchers, educators, company owners, government representative and tour guides with emphasis on joints understanding of the safety complexity.

3. Collaboration between Arctic tourism stakeholders

With an aim to address the complexity of tourist safety, more research integration, implementation and participatory processes is needed. In order to respond the research needs Arctic Guide Safety Education Collaboration (AGSE) was established as transdisciplinary project based on knowledge exchange between field of Safety, Tourism and Education, hence represented by researchers, educators and practitioners. The project focus on knowledge co-creation and curriculum development of guide education in the Arctic environment brining attention to increased involvement and integration of research on tourist safety in the Arctic. Working together across educational level creates and opportunity to link and transfer knowledge and experiences between tourism educators in the Arctic, thus preparing the ground to produce materials for teaching development and continue transitional collaboration in the field.

3. Material and methods

In order to address the research questions, workshops with stakeholders are taking place during Arctic Guide Safety Education (AGSE) Collaboration meetings in Iceland, Svalbard and Greenland between February – September 2023. Representatives from companies, tourist boards, emergency services and academia are invited to participate in 3hours workshop divided into 1h presentation about the network, learning about guiding schools in each location, followed by group discussion. Data collection includes 4 meetings with stakeholders, 3 AGSE seminars and one guide seminar in Svalbard. Data triangulation was used and included following sets of data: participatory workshop, stakeholder's survey, and guide's survey after Svalbard Guide Seminar. With an aim to understand the safety concern faced by the stakeholders, the workshops included discussion on enhancing collaboration on guides education between various stakeholders. The meetings are recorded, transcribed, and organized in thematic themes. We aim to analysed the findings with a theoretical approach of complexity and collaborative research theories.

4. Preliminary findings

Preliminary findings revealed that remoteness, climate change and limited resources are contributing factors in approaching tourist's safety in the Arctic by stakeholders. In addition, findings indicate the need for more integrated research on guides education and knowledge exchange between stakeholders, especially from the top-to bottom approach.

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