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Cross-community enactive research: a relational practice-based approach to academic engagement

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ABSTRACT

To respond to the call for broader ways to understand academic engagement in sustainable tourism, I conceptualized a relational practice-based approach, termed cross-community enactive research. Relying on central ideas from the enactive research approach by entrepreneurship scholar Bengt Johannisson, which draws on autoethnography and action research, and the communities of practice theory by educationalist Etienne Wenger, this approach involves researchers playing the temporary role of practitioners, with other practitioners. I applied such approach to an exploratory case concerning my participation in a collaborative, sustainable tourism project. The case discussion highlighted the non-linearity and mutuality of deep academic engagement. Such engagement has evolved over time as a growing web of relationships and roles, along which the processes relative to identity (being/becoming a sustainability-engaged person), knowledge (thinking sustainability) and action (doing sustainability) occur across diverse practices, sectors, and contexts. The case showed the potential of the elaborated approach for real-world impact, especially on the involved practitioners and destinations, and highlighted challenges about researchers' multiple roles, the formalization of their engagement in non-academic activities, and the research impact' predictability and novelty.

Introduction

The numerous sustainability challenges faced by the tourism sector require scholars' engagement in and contributions to the development of feasible solutions. Tourism scholars arguing for the importance of research impact acknowledge that such impact can be derived from diverse types of engagement (Font et al., 2019; Thomas & Ormerod, 2017). Two examples are providing practitioners with tools that support their activities towards greater sustainability and creating collaborative networks among tourism operators, public agencies and civil society (Nesticò & Maselli, 2020; Rinaldi et al., 2022). The latter example corresponds to the type of academic engagement that potentially leads to the economic and socio-cultural impact discussed by Jones and Walmsley (2022). These authors describe such type of engagement as emerging from non-linear co-creative processes, including possible unexpected and serendipitous events, occurring among actors with diverse backgrounds, areas of expertise and perspectives. In accord with some sustainability scholars (e.g. Fazey

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et al., 2020; West et al., 2019), Jones and Walmsley (2022) consider such processes particularly useful for promoting sustainability reflections and actions.

While the co-creation dimension of academic engagement is discussed in the tourism literature (e.g. Ngo et al., 2021; Phi & Dredge, 2019), the mutuality and, to a greater extent, the non-linearity dimensions are scarcely explored. Some relevant considerations can be found in studies adopting action research, transformative participatory approaches and academic activism (e.g. Duxbury et al., 2021; Hales et al., 2018; Rinaldi et al., 2022). Considering their engagement with non-academics, the scholars involved in these studies highlight the complexity of their engagement and methodological approaches. In some cases, these studies depict the researchers as engaged individuals entangled in close relations with non-academics in the potentially ambiguous and even messy reality of sustainability issues. Such openness about the complexity of some forms of academic engagement allows the discussion of non-linearity and mutuality, but due to the small number of tourism studies adopting such approaches, our understanding of these dimensions is still limited.

In this study, I discuss the non-linearity and mutuality dimensions of academic engagement by developing and applying a relational practice-based research approach, according to which research is a way of behaving, understanding and feeling that occurs along the development of relations with others and within a specific context. West et al. (2019) suggest that a relational practice-based approach to knowledge co-creation is crucial for elaborating on workable solutions towards sustainability. Referring to researchers as participants, they state, 'Rather than external observers seeking to "apply knowledge" to a complex world, participants are situated as actors within the complexity that they seek to influence (…), operating in dynamic, indeterminate worlds of perpetual becoming' (West et al., 2019, p. 548). In line with this statement, I draw on central concepts from the practice-based literature concerning entrepreneurship (Johannisson, 2018) and learning (Wenger, 1998) and elaborate on a relational practice-based approach to academic engagement, termed *cross-community enactive research*. Such approach is presented at the end of the theoretical section that follows this introduction. It is applied to an exploratory case study, which is discussed in the second part of this article. In this study, I make a twofold contribution. First, I investigate two scarcely explored dimensions of academic engagement, namely non-linearity and mutuality. Second, I present a novel academic engagement approach, particularly relevant to sustainability research and illustrative of a renewed conceptualization of research impacts.

Theoretical background

In the first part of this section, I discuss academic engagement, including research impact and relevant methodologies, and focus on its non-linearity and mutuality dimensions. Such dimensions are the points of departure for the development of a relational practice-based approach to deep academic engagement, called *cross-community enactive research*, which is presented in the second part of this section.

Emerging types of deep academic engagement

Scholars from various disciplines discuss academic engagement, research impact and methodologies in general and in relation to sustainability in particular. Extensive literature has explored the potential benefits of academia–industry–civil society collaboration (e.g. Trencher et al., 2014; Zilahy & Huisingh, 2009). In their literature review about academic engagement, Perkmann et al. (2021) define such concept as comprising knowledge-related interactions of academics with organizations external to academia. These authors identify some emerging themes, one of which is a call for more impactful research. This viewpoint, exemplified by Perkmann et al. (2021) by referring to the co-design of social innovations and the civic engagement of higher education institutions, is relevant to sustainability. This emphasis on the impact of research on real-world issues is evident in numerous

sustainability science studies that advocate for methodologies such as action research and partici-patory research inquiry (e.g. Fazey et al., 2020; Lang et al., 2017; Wiek & Lang, 2016).

The aforementioned methodologies, academic engagement and impact are discussed in the tourism literature (e.g. Brauer et al., 2019; Font et al., 2019; Thomas & Ormerod, 2017), but few studies consider an impactful relational long-term perspective on knowledge-co-creation. Among the studies adopting a long-term perspective on research impact on the environment and society, the 2022 special issue of the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* is particularly valuable (Jones & Walmsley, 2022). This special issue presents different research approaches promoting broad benefits through interventions at the company (e.g. Coghlan, 2020), destination (e.g. Rinaldi et al., 2022) and national (e.g. Buijtendijk & Eijgelaar, 2022) levels. In their editorial, Jones and Walmsley (2022) invite scholars to conceptualize their engagement as a change co-creative practice that is non-linear and intrinsically complex. This invitation can be related to Thomas (2021) considerations about a limited but increasing number of promising studies. Such studies build on the ideas argued in the aforementioned sustainability studies, especially the emphasis on actionable knowledge and participation, and concern transformative participatory approaches and studies characterized by scholars' clear political positions in relevant debates.

Citing an example of transformative participatory approaches, Thomas (2021) reports about Duxbury et al. (2021) work, which discusses a project based on workshops facilitating research–prac-tice knowledge exchange. Other recent examples include the studies about two tourism develop-ment projects involving the residents and local businesses (Liburd et al., 2022), innovation through a series of workshops with local stakeholders (Bertella et al., 2021), and a destination plan-ning project involving the municipality, the destination management organization, urban planners and other stakeholders (Lalicic & Weber-Sabil, 2021). The common aspects of these and similar studies are the scholars' use of creative methods, intention to promote transformations and willing-ness to engage deeply with non-academics. Engagement with non-academics is the core of the approach concerning the scholars' adoption of clear political positions in debates relevant to tourism, as mentioned by Thomas (2021). Usually referred to as academic activism, such approach is about scholars' value-laden cognitive and emotional engagement in practices that differ from the typical academic ones (Dredge, 2017; Hales et al., 2018; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010). Academic acti-vists work, individually or collectively, to explore and disseminate their ideas within and outside aca-demia, using academic channels, such as journals and conferences, and other media, such as newspapers and associations.

A deep form of academic engagement is a common characteristic of transformative participatory approaches and academic activism. Based on the concept of work engagement from psychology (e.g. Bakker et al., 2008), deep academic engagement is used here to indicate participation in non-academic activities, characterized by dedication, absorption, and a fulfilling state of mind. Such engagement can be challenging and demanding. For example, in their transformative partici-patory study, Duxbury et al. (2021) comment on the difficult and sometimes unintentional role of researchers as consultants, as well as on the critical factors of trust building and time constraints. On a more practical level, Bertella et al. (2021) write about the necessity of funds to employ assistants and professional coaches with expertise in creativity for workshops with stakeholders. Bertella (2022) discusses some challenges experienced by researchers deeply immersed in the field and engaged in close interactions with non-academics. Building on Ateljevic et al. (2005) discussion about reflexivity, Bertella (2022) presents a list of questions to trigger scholars' reflections on crucial aspects, for example, their motivations and legitimacy to engage and their perspectives on sustainability.

Non-linearity and mutuality dimensions of deep academic engagement

Little used and particularly challenging and demanding, transformative participatory approaches and academic activism provide opportunities to reflect on non-linearity and mutuality dimensions of deep academic engagement. To exemplify such dimensions, some considerations emerging

from several studies (Duxbury et al., 2021; Hales et al., 2018; Rinaldi et al., 2022) can be useful. Duxbury et al. (2021) report about their personal growth as one of the effects of their project. This is an extraordinary positive output for the researchers, in addition to the traditional academic one about knowledge advancements. In their autoethnographic reflections, Hales et al. (2018) suggest that mutual relations with non-academics are common and crucial. These activist scholars depict their engagement as emerging from a variety of events and situations, including their life stories interrelated with those of the researched subjects. Mutuality is also important in Rinaldi et al. (2022) work, which additionally emphasizes the non-linearity dimension of engagement, viewed as a sustainability co-creation process evolving through cycles of communication and inter-actions with the destination stakeholders. Although not defined as transformative, these researchers' action research approach, applied over several years and across several projects, allows them to identify effects on the residents, the scholars and the students from the local university. Hence, in the case of deep academic engagement aiming for a wide impact, mutuality and non-linearity appear prominent.

Despite being important dimensions of specific forms of academic engagement that some scholars consider particularly promising, non-linearity and mutuality are scarcely discussed in the tourism literature. Presumably, this is due to the limited number of such studies and to the tendency to conform to more linear and objective ways to do and talk about research. To gain a better understanding of such dimensions, in this study, I develop *cross-community enactive research* as a novel approach to academic engagement. Such approach builds on the considerations from the sustainability literature that highlight the potential of relational practice-based perspectives on knowledge co-creation (e.g. Apetrei et al., 2021; West et al., 2019; West et al., 2020). As argued by West et al. (2019), such perspectives fit the complexity of sustainability issues as they emphasize the link between thinking (about sustainability) and doing (putting sustainable solutions into action) and the relevance of improvisation, joint exploration and situated judgements. In line with this position, I develop the cross-community enactive research approach by integrating central ideas from the works of entrepreneurship scholar Bengt Johannisson and educationalist Etienne Wenger.

Cross-community enactive research

To create an impact through research, academics need a solid understanding of the phenomenon they study; to this end, a deep form of engagement can be crucial. In social sciences, deep engagement is usually associated with methodologies such as ethnography and autoethnography (e.g. Van Maanen, 2011). As presented above with reference to tourism studies (Thomas, 2021) and in line with the broader literature (e.g. Aagerd Nielsen & Steen Nielsen, 2006; Chevalier & Buckles, 2013), deep academic engagement can be referred to as approaches such as action research, transformative participatory approach and academic activism. Exploring entrepreneurship and viewing it as a practice of orchestration of resources, creativity and opportunity, taking in a constantly changing context, Johannisson (2018) proposes a radical type of deep engagement, namely *enactive research*. Such approach draws on autoethnography and action research and involves researchers taking the temporary role of practitioners, in the specific case of entrepreneurs (Fletcher, 2011; Johannisson, 2020; Steyaert & Landström, 2011). By doing so, academics can utterly understand the field and eventually create an impact. They become 'agents and activists, acknowledging and mobilizing all their intellectual as well as embodied skills, cognitive as well as affective and conative ones' (Johannisson, 2018, p. 5).

The preceding quote highlights the prerequisites for adopting the enactive research approach, which are specified with particular attention to scholars' capacities, attitudes and behaviours. Johannisson (2018) emphasizes academics' capacity and willingness to not only engage but do so as committed and open-minded authentic persons who realize their potentials by taking responsibility and action. The time spent on the field is considered essential as such type of research requires academics to experience 'in their own skin' the lives of practitioners, including the various phases of

a project or a venture, the ups and downs, challenges, successes, failures and unexpected events. Time is commented on also in relation to retrospectivity, which refers to the need for the enacting researcher, once having left the field, to reflect deeply and systematically on the insights gained from acting as a practitioner. Taking a step back and reclaiming the scholar's role is the last phase of the enactive research, after the phases of familiarizing oneself with and entering the context, then actualizing and initiating an idea (Johannisson, 2018). Each phase is characterized by the scholar/practitioner playing one or more roles, including explorer, visionary, executor and participant observer. Thus, the scholar's capacity to perform all these roles is one of the prerequisites for engaging in enactive research.

Although Johannisson (2018) qualifies enactive research as aiming for coordinated action, it can be useful, especially in sustainability-related contexts, to emphasize the collective dimension to a greater extent. This can be done by adopting the communities of practice (CoP) theory. The enactive research approach relies on a socio-constructionism view of reality and a strong emphasis on the context where such reality is 'shared and imaginatively created by interacting individuals' (Fletcher, 2011, p. 71). Its theoretical foundation is practice theories, which highlight the centrality of practice as a way of behaving, understanding and feeling, as well as a situated process where knowledge and action occur simultaneously, shaping each other and the practitioners' identities (Corradi et al., 2010; Reckwitz, 2002). This underlying understanding of reality, knowledge, action and identity also characterizes the CoP theory by Etienne Wenger (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). According to this theory, individuals form groups, often spontaneously and informally, based on a common domain of interest, and while acting on such interest, they engage cognitively and emotionally and build their identities as members of such groups. The latter are conceptualized as communities (within a practice) or constellations of communities (across different practices). Thus, to emphasize the collective dimension of doing sustainability research and the fact that the enacting researcher moves between and contributes to two communities (academia and industry), the enacting research approach can be revisited by adopting the CoP concept. Such a change can be indicated by addressing the approach as *cross-community enactive research*.

Few tourism studies adopt practice theories and/or the CoP concept to tourism practitioners, despite such perspectives' potential for collaboration towards sustainability. As noted by Lamers et al. (2017), many tourism studies relying on practice theories explore tourist practices (e.g. Bargeman & Richards, 2020; de Souza Bispo, 2016). Only some exceptions refer practice to actors other than tourists, for example, some contributions in James et al. (2018) book, Çakmak et al. (2018) informal economy study and Ren et al. (2021) cruise tourism project. Few studies follow Shaw and Williams (2009) and Cooper's (2014) suggestions about the CoP theory's particular relevance for collaboration. For example, Bertella (2011) and Phi et al. (2017) explore entrepreneurial CoPs. These CoPs are temporally organized through projects acting as platforms where learning occurs through conversations, reflections, artefacts and actions, as well as highlight an idea of learning that goes beyond knowledge transfer and routines. These aspects are crucial for sustainability since an increasing number of projects funded by public agencies are centred on stakeholders' collaboration aiming at new ways to develop tourism.

Focusing on sustainable tourism projects and CoPs, Bertella and Rinaldi's (2021) study suggests a prominent sense of responsibility among the main participants (NGOs, public agencies, associations and companies) of collaborative projects for sustainability, as well as a tendency for projects to build on each other. The authors also note that some participants move across contexts and projects, providing continuity to the sustainability commitment and ultimately, forming constellations of communities of different practices. Bertella and Rinaldi (2021) adopt para-ethnography in the form of a close collaboration between them, one an academic and the other an NGO representative. They argue for such methodology, referring to this collaboration as potentially offering researchers valuable insights into the investigated phenomenon without influencing it. Different from such a position, my current study places the researchers among the practitioners and emphasizes the influence that researchers can have on practice. Based on their interest in sustainability and

tourism, enacting researchers change their practice, moving from academia to industry and then back to academia.

Table 1 summarizes this section's content by describing the phases of the cross-community enactive research approach in comparison with the related approaches. The rows refer to three research phases, inspired by the phases discussed by Johannisson (2018). The columns refer to the enactive research approach to entrepreneurship (Johannisson, 2018, 2020) and the second to Wenger's CoP theory applied to sustainable tourism projects (Bertella & Rinaldi, 2021). The last column shows how such approaches are integrated and revisited in the cross-community enactive research approach developed in this study. The complexity and dynamism of such approach suggest its relevance for investigating the mutuality and non-linearity dimensions of a deep form of academic engagement in sustainable tourism, as empirically illustrated by the exploratory case discussed in the next section.

Before proceeding to illustrate the proposed approach, it is noteworthy to highlight that such approach relies on ontological and epistemological assumptions concerning a reality that can be explored while unfolding along with the development of relations between the researchers with other actors in the field. The result is a type of research inherently influenced by the researchers' actions and interactions, their beliefs, and values. Consequently, this approach is quite far from the idea of scientific inquiry being always dispassionate, rational, objective and value-free. Axiologically, the cross-community enactive research approach can be located close to the related approaches of autoethnography, action research and activism, which view research as a value-laden space for dialogue and change, as discussed by some scholars (e.g. Holland, 1999; Jenkins et al., 2020), also from the tourism academia (e.g. Everett, 2010; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010). As mentioned in the initial section about deep engagement, the cross-community enactive research approach requires that the researchers reflect on their practice, for example their motivations, legitimacy, and their perspectives on relevant topics (Atelje-vic et al., 2005; Bertella, 2022). In the cross-community enactive research, the concept of reflexivity plays a central role as it refers not only to the way the researchers relate to the investigated topic and the researched, but also to the underlying questioning of the dominant view

Table 1. The enactive research approach to entrepreneurship, the CoP theory applied to sustainable tourism projects, and the cross-community enactive research approach.

Phases	Enactive research (entrepreneurship)	Communities of practice and constellations (sustainable tourism projects)	Cross-community enactive research
Entering the field and familiarization	The researcher takes the entrepreneur's role and explores the context.	Individuals/groups meet, sometimes across practices, to form collaborative groups based on their shared interest in sustainable tourism.	The researcher as a temporary tourism practitioner joins/ contributes to form a group of practitioners based on their shared interest in sustainable tourism.
Actualizing, initiating and implementing a project	The researcher acts as a visionary and executor, experiencing first-hand an entrepreneur's life.	The practitioners work together to achieve a goal and learn about how to practise sustainable tourism.	The researcher works with the tourism practitioners to achieve a goal, contributing to the project and learning about how to practise sustainable tourism.
Exiting the field, following up developments and reflecting	The researcher exits the entrepreneur's role, follows up on the initiated activities and observes retrospectively his/her experience for possible knowledge advancements.	The practitioners' group dissolves at the end of the project, but their relations persist and constitute the basis for possible future collaboration.	The researcher exits the tourism practitioner's role, follows up on the project developments, nurtures the established relations for future collaboration and observes retrospectively his/her experience for possible knowledge advancements.

of a value-free knowledge production, breaking out role boundaries (researcher, researched) that might limit awareness and insightfulness.

An exploratory case about cross-community enactive research

In this section, I discuss an exploratory case to illustrate and reflect further on the cross-community enactive research. The case concerned my participation, as a member of a non-profit organization (NPO), in a collaborative project among three small-sized organizations: the NPO to which I belonged and two tourism companies offering boat tours, town guided tours and tours of a food production facility. The project consisted of the design and testing of an experience within a sustainable tourism programme. The case covered the project duration, from the call for applications for funds to the submission of the final report, and the subsequent months during which I worked on the gained insights (March 2021–July 2022).

The data collection and analysis were conducted by following autoethnographic practices. I participated in several activities: drafting the project application, designing the experience, developing and analyzing the post-visit survey and drafting the final report. I attended 10 meetings, during which I took notes. I collected such notes in a journal, adding notes about the background information on the project participants, as well as how the various topics and choices were addressed and, in some cases, negotiated. In the data analysis, I followed an analytical approach (Snow et al., 2003) and referred to the framework representing the cross-community enactive research approach, as presented in the third column in Table 1. To refine this framework, I used codes and subcodes on aspects relevant to the relational and practice-based dimensions. Some examples are type of relation (subcodes: friendship, acquaintance, etc.), common previous projects (subcodes: whale-watching guidelines, publication, etc.), frequency and type of interactions (subcodes: regular, limited to the specific project, etc.) and intended beneficiaries of the project (subcodes: individual, organization, etc.). The coded text was synthesized in a reasoned narrative structure, based on the research phases shown in Table 1. The narrative is presented in the following subsections, where some information is omitted to preserve the anonymity of the organizations and the individuals.

Engaging together (Table 1, rows 1 and 2)

The first two phases of cross-community enactive research involved the establishment of the first contacts among the organizations. This constitutes a good example of the non-linearity and mutuality dimensions of deep academic engagement and shows the reflexivity considerations characterising my engagement from the very beginning. I contacted two tourism companies to propose a joint application for funds, and I did so as a member of an NPO, which I joined in 2015. This NPO was the case study of a previous research work (2011), and the founder, who co-authored a research note with me (2015) and helped me with my work concerning whale-watching (2015–present), is also a long-time friend (since 2000). The companies I contacted were also subjects of some of my previous studies, and I had involved two of their representatives as co-researchers in two works (2019, 2021). I had also co-authored field notes with one of them, based on her experience as the founder of an environmental NPO (2020). The five individuals involved in the project worked or had worked in various contexts, sometimes simultaneously, including the non-profit sector, the tourism sector (companies) and academia (biology and tourism). From this background information, it is evident that non-linearity and mutuality, in the form of entanglements of relations of various types and lengths, characterized the project and my engagement in it.

The observation concerning such entanglements resonates with the considerations about academic activism (Hales et al., 2018) and deep forms of academic engagement (Jones & Walmsley, 2022; Thomas, 2021) and can be discussed further in relation to mutuality and through reflexivity considerations (Bertella, 2022). My relationships with the individuals involved in the project followed non-linear paths across not only contexts (personal/ professional, business, academia and non-profit)

but also roles. In the project, I performed the roles of NPO member and practitioner (experience designer). It is reasonable to think that my role as a researcher "stuck" to my person because several project participants knew me previously in my role as an academic. It can be assumed that my legitimacy in joining the project came primarily from my membership in the NPO and secondarily, in academia. Different from Johannisson's (2018, p. 2020) suggestion, I did not suspend my academic role when entering the field. At the first meeting, when discussing the intended project outcomes, I specified that in addition to helping with some ideas based on my knowledge about experience design and contributing to drafting the required documentation, I was considering using the project to write a scientific paper. My partners showed enthusiasm at the idea of a possible paper. Although my academic institution was not one of the partner organizations, potential outcomes in traditional academic terms were included among the intended outcomes by all participants. This can be indicative of a more-encompassing meaning attached to mutuality by the project participants, who viewed reciprocal benefits in broad terms, not limited to possible organizational boundaries.

Further elaboration on my motivations and the values influencing my engagement helps identify a sustainability-relevant aspect of mutuality, namely responsibility. My primary motivation for proposing the collaboration was to enable the organizations' representatives to meet each other because I believed that they attached the same meaning to sustainability, characterised by a marked emphasis on the intrinsic value of the nature, and a genuine interest and concern for the natural environment. Such characteristic made me think that together, the organizations could have developed a high-quality 'green' product for the destination. The latter accorded with the attitude and reasoning shown by the project participants during several meetings, where they mentioned benefits in relation to not only the organizations (new product, funds) and the involved individuals (job possibilities) but also the destination and the natural environment. The participants agreed that as the new product was based on experiencing nature, it had to be developed in an attempt to reduce possible negative impacts on the environment, as well as educate and inspire the tourists to adopt 'greener' lifestyles. This suggests that mutuality was understood in relation to not only the involved organizations and individuals but also nature. Some discussions highlighted our shared dilemma about our organizations adding pressure on the destination's natural environment and about the extent to which the new experience could affect tourists' lifestyles. The marked sense of responsibility mentioned by Bertella and Rinaldi (2021) in their study about CoPs for sustainable tourism is also observable in this case, although partly problematized by the participants.

The observed sense of responsibility can be commented on in relation to the collective dimension of engagement by the project participants and identity building, which are key aspects of the CoP theory (Wenger, 1998). As mentioned, the shared interest in the environment was evident during several meetings, when all participants expressed concern about the pressure on nature by human activities, tourism included. This concern was discussed in the group and appeared to influence, although with some conflicting feelings, the participants' choices in their practices, both occupational (business, research, activism) and personal (e.g. food and transport choices). Together with the sense of responsibility, the self-perceived identity of an environmentally concerned and committed person emerged as common among all participants. Despite such communality, the temporal limitation of the project did not allow the formation of a strong sense of group belonging. Another reason might be that due to COVID-19 restrictions, the group met only online during the entire project. Consequently, rather than a CoP, the project group can be conceptualized as an expression of a constellation of practitioners, as suggested by Bertella and Rinaldi (2021).

Other core elements of Wenger's theory emerged during the phase when I acted as a visionary and executor, in line with Johannisson's (2018) suggestion. In this phase, I was involved in designing the tourism experience, writing the application, preparing and analyzing a survey targeting the tourists, and elaborating on the final report. Commitment and creativity – when designing the new product – characterized my partners' and my work. Similar to any entrepreneurial project, ours developed along a path characterized by ups (e.g. obtaining the project funding), downs (e.g.

coordination problems and delays), challenges (e.g. time constraints) and unexpected events (e.g. a project participant hospitalized). The way that such activities were performed was typical of CoPs (Bertella, 2011; Wenger, 1998): sharing ideas and co-creating artefacts that could support our conversations (meeting minutes, presentations of meeting agendas and main points) and necessary outputs of our work (application, storytelling scripts to be used with tourists, survey questionnaire and final report). To facilitate such processes, in addition to the meetings, we used a digital platform for messaging between meetings and co-writing and sharing the documents.

During the project, I reflected on possible knowledge advancements derived from my experience in the field. The cases to which Johannisson (2018) applies the enactive research approach are very demanding entrepreneurial projects, limiting the time that the researchers can use to reflect on possible traditional academic outputs of their engagement. The project that I engaged in was far less demanding; therefore, I had the time to dedicate to such reflections. Nonetheless, the latter remained at a quite practical level. My reflections focused on the process of experience design, and the possibility to promote and measure long-term effects on the tourists in terms of 'greener' lifestyles.

Leaving the field (Table 1, row 3)

The main activities in the final phase of my engagement consisted of exiting the field, following up on possible developments and reflecting on the overall impact, including possible knowledge advancements (Johannisson, 2018). When I left the field, I remained available to help with a new application for funds to refine the tested product, which led to a renewed product for the summer of 2022. As shown in Table 2, the short-term outcomes on the practitioners, the specific organizations and the destination include funds, a new refined product and a job position. The medium-term outcomes refer to the new product as part of the organizations' portfolios and some technical equipment bought with the project funds. The product can be considered 'green' due to its low local carbon footprint and environmental education aspect; therefore, it is included among the impacts on the destination. The long-term impacts on the practitioners include their increased competence in project management, especially the necessity of a back-up plan, and local knowledge about possible constraints from the power relations among the companies operating on the destination site. Networking can be considered a positive long-term and medium-term impact on the involved individuals, their organizations and the destination.

Regarding the intended impact on research, the process of reflecting and elaborating on my experience, aiming for some knowledge advancements, extended over several months. I discarded the initial ideas about a possible contribution to experience design, as I struggled to identify a possible novelty in this research area. I realised that the lectures arranged by the funding organisation, which we, as project participants, attended were limited: our organisations already knew and applied

Table 2. An overview of the outcomes and impacts derived from my partners' and my engagement in the collaborative project.

Outcome/impact on the practitioners and their organizations			Outcome/impact on the destination		Intended outcome/impact on research
Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term	Short-term	Medium- and long-term	Short-, medium- and long-term
Funding of the pilot project, new product, job position as a guide (summer 2021); further funding, refined product (summer 2022)	Technical equipment, new product in the product portfolio	Competence and knowledge (project management, power relations), networking with relevant local organizations and among like-minded people	A new product (low local carbon footprint, educational aspect) summer 2021, 2022	Networking among relevant local organizations across sectors	Knowledge advancements about stories and academic engagement

the experience design methods and tools on which the lectures were focused. What we, and presumably other companies, needed was an overarching strategy for the destination and some sustainability criteria and measurement tools tailored on the specific context. I thought that experience design methods and tools tended to be overcommunicated, and the risk was that they were not presented as part of complex processes, such as negotiation processes about vision development and strategic planning at different levels, as well as monitoring and evaluation processes. These reflections led to my intention to intensify my future research efforts with the aim to link frameworks and concepts belonging to different research areas and develop user-friendly methods and tools.

Eventually, I focused on the project's collective and creative aspects and reflected on the possibility to link such aspects to the concept of story in tourism, as this concept was often used when we discussed the tourism experience as well as the destination development in the recent years and our wishes and vision for its future. While drafting these ideas, I reflected further about my engagement in the field and the possibility to frame it as a form of enactive research. Particularly, I reflected on what I considered my main contribution to the project, which was the use of my contacts to initiate a dialogue among the organisations aiming to the emergence of collaborative relations. These ideas about the concept of story and my experience as practitioner collaborating with other practitioners were developed into two drafts targeting scientific journals. The impact of these works was uncertain at the time of writing the drafts of this paper and, eventually, resulted into two publications, Bertella (2023) and the current article.

Conclusion

In this paper, I discussed deep academic engagement by developing and applying a research approach, termed cross-community enactive research, involving scholars taking the temporary role of tourism practitioners and engaging in a joint enterprise with non-academics. The investigated case concerned my engagement, in the roles of NPO member, experience designer and scholar, in a collaborative project about sustainable tourism. This study's findings confirmed the suggestions presented in some recent studies about adopting action research, transformative participatory approaches and activism, and showed how deep academic engagement evolved over a considerable amount of time and along non-linear paths across the researchers' professional and personal lives. The case illustrated how this type of engagement in sustainability issues depended on a shared interest among academics and non-academics, as well as on a broad understanding of mutuality in relation to intended benefits, which were conceptualized at the individual, organizational, destination and global levels. The findings showed that the mutuality regarding the use of nature is linked to a sense of responsibility that was prominent yet perceived as partly problematic. Finally, the case offered some insights into the potentials and challenges for achieving different types of impact when engaging deeply in the field.

This study's methodological contribution concerns the development of a relational practice-based approach to sustainability research – cross-community enactive research approach. Such contribution responds to the call for a new conceptualisation of academic engagement by Thomas (2021) and Jones and Walmsley (2022). Based on the enactive research approach by entrepreneurship scholar Bengt Johannisson and the learning theory by educationalist Etienne Wenger, the developed approach highlights the entanglements of relations and roles that characterize co-creative processes for sustainability across practices, sectors and contexts. Such entanglements form rather spontaneous webs of constellations of practitioners, where being and becoming a responsible person, reflecting on sustainability and acting to develop and implement sustainability solutions are closely interrelated. Different from previous studies applying Wenger's theory to tourism collaboration, the current study views the researchers as among the practitioners; enacting researchers engage in and contribute to the practitioners' constellations as part of their identity building to learn more about sustainable tourism and create impact. Regarding the latter, this study's

findings suggest that the research impact should not be conceptualized, either as emerging exclusively from cognitive processes or in univocal terms. Rather, its conceptualization should be broader and include the adoption of a long-term perspective in which formal/informal and professional/personal relations among individuals are paramount, and commitment to research and practice go hand-in-hand.

The adoption of the cross-community enactive research approach entails some challenges. As similar approaches based on a deep dive of researchers in the phenomena of study, the proposed approach needs epistemic and axiological reflexivity reflections. This requires introspection and self-criticism. Another challenge concerns this approach's unpredictability in terms of the research impact. In comparison with more structured approaches, the research outcomes of this approach are not necessarily evident to scholars when entering the field. For example, in the investigated case, the intended research contribution was unclear in the beginning of my engagement in the field and at the end, turned out to be different from the focus of the project in which I engaged and the ideas I developed while in the field. This uncertainty requires the enacting researcher to be particularly open-minded and attentive. The novelty of a possible research impact is also uncertain, highly dependent on the researcher's capacities and the innovativeness of the conducted activities while acting as a practitioner. Another challenge involves the researcher's multiple roles. My engagement was characterized as playing three roles, which did not create any confusion or conflict, presumably due to similar situations experienced by the practitioners whom I engaged with. Nonetheless, it can be assumed that simultaneously performing various roles can be problematic, especially when the collaboration is more official than it was in my case.

The latter, the official nature of the researchers' engagement, poses a further challenge. I engaged in the collaboration with no official link to my academic institution. On one side, this led to the inevitable situation of working on the project in my free time. On the other side, it gave me considerable freedom in relation to institutional rules and logics, such as possible explicit or implicit constraints about with whom to collaborate, for how long and how. In my case, possible constraints could have been the need to spend time on formalizing the project and perhaps the impossibility to apply for funds, which were targeting companies. These reflections point to the opportunity for scholars interested in enactive research to ponder the advantages and disadvantages of engaging officially.

This study's empirical part was limited to an exploratory case; more studies are needed to refine the developed approach. Future studies could help explore deeper the processes typical of CoPs. For example, Wenger (1998) identifies three modes of belonging – engagement, alignment and imagination – that are crucial for learning. This aspect deserves attention as it can contribute to filling the gap between sustainable tourism theory and practice. Studies adopting the cross-community enactive research approach could explore the modality through which engagement, alignment and imagination are discussed, negotiated and practised, as well as the related consequences. Another aspect that merits attention is the possibility to prefer collaborative autoethnography over autoethnography. Future studies could explore whether an approach involving pairs or groups of enacting researchers joining the work of practitioners would be opportune. Several researchers' involvement would strengthen the approach due to less dependence on one individual and the possible inclusion of people with different competencies that can contribute to real-world and research impact. Nonetheless, the long-term commitment and the blurring of professional and personal lives required of such pairs/groups among themselves and with practitioners, which relates to the typical spontaneity and informal emergence of CoPs, could pose major challenges to the adoption of a collaborative autoethnographic approach.

Disclosure statement

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