



Women's voices in tourism research

Contributions to knowledge and
letters to future generations

Antonia Correia
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ANTONIA CORREIA AND SARA DOLNICAR

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND



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The University of Queensland, St Lucia QLD, Australia

140. Letter from Isabel Rodriguez



Dear exceptional tourism female researchers of the future,

At the time of writing, I am still an early career researcher. Looking back, my research journey, has not always been an easy one. Let me explain why. I come from Spain and I belong to what you might call the *Tourism-generation* of researchers who are formally trained in the tourism discipline. As you are surely aware, in its beginnings, tourism was a field that moved forwards thanks to the work of academics coming from many other disciplines. This has enriched the field and set the foundations of the multidisciplinary views and approaches that characterise our research.

I began my tourism studies back in 1994 when these courses were offered for the first time at my university and they were still unofficial programmes. From my BSc, MSc to PhD, my academic story revolves around always being part of the first cohort of students in all the pioneering tourism programmes being run for the first time. We were definitely “guinea pigs” learning by trial and error. Tourism has always been a desirable ‘cake’ with many portions to be shared and consumed by different disciplines and departments. To be honest, where I come from, I don’t think the creators of tourism programmes really thought about us, the tourism students, as academics or researchers, they simply had no plans for that. Even when the doctoral studies programme in tourism started, I was discouraged from going down that route since as a Doctor in Tourism I was not going to get a position at any of the traditional disciplinary departments of the university even though I had already been working there for 10 years as a research assistant! The idea of being discouraged from becoming a doctor in tourism by my mentors, and paradoxically creators of the doctoral programme in tourism, sparked my determination to challenge this constraining view held by others about the career potential for Doctors in Tourism. Sometimes when you are young, you have a limited view and it is difficult to imagine the many options that are possible, but the (academic) world is full of exciting and varied possibilities. My desire of growing and expanding my horizons, challenging my own fears and uncertainties led me to knock on the door of one of the most respected academics in the tourism field at the University of Surrey in the UK. To my surprise the door opened, and Professor Allan Williams became my informal PhD supervisor and the person who has always believed in me ever since. I received my Doctorate in July 2015, and in September 2015 I submitted a Marie Curie Research Fellowship proposal to the European Union. Nonetheless, these are very prestigious and competitive research fellowships which, in my year of submission, had a 12% success rate and I got one! I could hardly believe it and this was one

of the happiest moments of my life. Being awarded this fellowship meant that I could spend 2 years at the University of Surrey to deliver the research I had planned! A dream came true! But there are inherent sacrifices in every choice and I have left many things behind and worked very hard since as you know the academic career is not an easy one. From all the highs and lows I encountered so far along my journey, I have some reflections and advice to share with you.

1) Strive to be highly original

My work on trying to understand highly original academics in tourism (see my chapter on tourism innovation in this book) has made me deeply reflect on the type of researcher I am and the one I would like to be in the future. I believe my research interests in innovation and originality, stems from my personality and background. I am creative and entrepreneurial which, I guess, is an essential requirement for all research, right? I have endless curiosity to understand a phenomenon (yes, this is a lifestyle, a way of being in this world!) and I am captivated by the intelligence of bright minds that push me out of my comfort zone. The moment I enjoy most is the spark of a new idea and the challenge of how to execute it. This is a crucial moment in which you need to do a thorough literature search to make sure that this has not been done before. Some of my ideas seemed very original to me to later found out that they were already done by many others! I must admit that I am not a lone wolf... I love working with others, I believe that working together brings about greater ideas and binds complimentary views and skills. The experience and outcome make it even more enriching and enjoyable! As I progress through my career, I would like to work within interdisciplinary teams and experiment further with novel methods to allow my research to move from incrementally original to highly original or ground breaking.

I would recommend you make **originality a fundamental principle** which drives your research choices and therefore be very selective about the research which you carry out. Try to always find a strongly defined originality angle. Because it always pays off. In an academic world with such a high production of papers that often leave you cold or with the “so what” question in mind, we need to start thinking on the need of exciting our readers. Because originality is exciting, and editors and reviewers are dying to see more exciting work. I personally aim to choose quality (and by this, I mean exciting, relevant and rigorous work) over quantity. I think good ideas need time to be thought through and to mature so the right knowledge is applied to move the field forward. I don't think there is a recipe or “one size fits all” model for having a successful career as (an original) researcher, rather there are **many pathways and everybody must find their own way**: your personality will play a key role, your commitment and passion for research, your networks, and the right academic environment. Just make sure you have fun and enjoy the ride!

2) Persevere, be brave and listen to your intuition

First, remember that you will often experience lows and setbacks along your journey, but I can guarantee that if you **persevere** you will also experience many highs and ultimately, I am sure you will have a successful and rewarding career. Don't forget that this will often mean pushing yourself **outside the boundaries of your comfort zone**. Be **non-conformist** and **always listen to your inner voice and intuition** that guides you in the right direction to excel and to **be the best version of yourself**. Be **brave** and **don't be scared of knocking on doors** since these open more often than expected. Someone said to me once something I believe is very true: *“being brave isn't the absence of fear. Being brave is having that fear but finding a way through it”*. I have faced many types of fear: of public speaking, of rejection in grants, in papers, not being as bright as my colleagues and I have had to overcome them and don't let them stop me. I have eventually also learnt that rejection and failure are part of the learning process that we must embrace and accept along the research lifespan and that these do not undermine our value.

3) Be collegial and help others to reach their research dreams

Having had this amazing mentor (Allan Williams) who has helped along my path and has served as a role model of the academic I would like to become, has made me think of the importance of collegiality not only when you reach high in the research ladder but preferably all along the journey. This research life

is about **philanthropy and collegiality** by becoming that person that believes in others and helps them excel with honesty, respect and ethics. Maybe it is my caring personality but helping others to reach their research dreams by being part of those great dreams too is something I would strive for because it is extremely rewarding. As one entrepreneur I interviewed once said to me: *"when you reach the top, you should remember to send the elevator back down for the others"*. To be honest I always think that when we die we won't be remembered for the papers we have written but for the impression and the memories we have left in all those who engaged with us. Also, as a sign of respect for academia, when entering the research temple, please try to leave behind any ego and unnecessary competitiveness and rivalry.

All the best!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Isabel Rodriguez', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Isabel Rodriguez

University of Surrey, United Kingdom