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Shades of gray in tourism research: A systematic literature review of generational diversity in air transport workforce

Over the past 20 years, a great deal of tourism research has been devoted to air transport because of the industries' interlocking system and inextricable linkage (Papatheodorou, 2021; Smith et al., 2021). Each field of inquiry, tourism and air transport, is informed independently by economics, geography, marketing and management creating numerous opportunities for scholarly cross-fertilisation (Duval, 2013). Yet, the workforce remains a neglected research domain as it is evidenced by the classifications of topics addressed in the relevant literature reviews. For example, Papatheodorou's (2021) most recent review examined the airline-airport-tourism destination authority systemic relationship, highlighting key features of each stakeholder and providing a total of 10,554 related intra- and inter-stakeholder possible relationships, covering all the above disciplines. Interestingly, none of the possible relationships involved the workforce of the airlines-airport and/or tourism destination authorities. Likewise, Spasojevic et al.'s (2018) systematic review of air transport literature as it is related to tourism from 2000 to 2014 reveals seven themes none of which can be linked directly to the workforce with the exception of Management. In fact, the workforce themes have been subsumed into classifications such as "crews" or "cabin crews" which hardly does justice to this field of research, given that themes such as "Passengers" "Alliances" and "Airports" merit separate clusters. This narrow focus on workforce does not align with the new ways of working and the future of the industry. The International Air Transport Association recommends that as new technologies and value shifts change how and why people work, the industry will need to invest in skills for future aviation leaders and workers as well as to communicate the benefits of working in the sector (IATA, 2018; p.55). Such workforce investments, in turn, encourage the development of a professionalised workforce with the capacity to adapt and respond to new and changing circumstances, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, and therefore strengthen the resilience of air transport employees and organisations (Sun et al., 2021).

In this paper we set about qualifying this contention of narrow focus by positing the reason as partially due to the tendency of relevant literature reviews to rely purely on peer-reviewed articles, the so called 'white literature' (Adams et al., 2017, p. 432). It is commonly agreed that the peer review process provides the opportunity to reduce the number of errors and to serve as a self-regulating selection tool signalling the level of quality for the readership (Rodríguez et al., 2019). However, scholars are increasingly recognizing instances where it seems appropriate to broaden the evidence search beyond the limits of academic journals to incorporate 'grey literature' including the study of gender issues (Je et al., 2020) and sexual violence in tourism organisations (Ram, 2021), medical tourism (Xu et al., 2021) and tourism entanglement with colonialism among others (Grimwood et al., 2019).

We argue and substantiate the case that incorporating grey literature – the diverse and heterogeneous body of material available outside, and not subject to, traditional academic peer-review processes such as theses (Bachelor, Honours, Masters, and Doctoral), conference papers and government departments reports (Adams et al., 2017) – into the study of air

transport workforce as it relates to tourism is also appropriate to broaden our understanding of the topic.

Against this background, the aim of this paper is to extend the engagement of tourism research with this line of inquiry by offering the first literature review of air transport workforce as it relates to tourism through the lens of generational research. To accomplish this aim we set four research objectives: first, develop a conceptual framework to accommodate the bundle of the tourism, air transport and generational research; second, apply a rigorous and transparent approach in identifying the relevant literature; third, illustrate the evolution and trends of the identified literature; and fourth, develop an evidence base of single and multigenerational studies.

Accordingly, we make the following three contributions to the literature: First, we introduce a conceptual framework that provides the opportunity to examine generational diversity within the air transport workforce as it relates to tourism. It is a three-dimensional framework shaped by (a) Baum et al.'s (2016) tourism workforce taxonomy, (b) Papatheodorou's (2021) proximity scale of relevance between air transport services and tourism and (c) generational theory expressed through the social forces and the cohort perspectives. In doing so we address the recent call from Kock et al. (2020) for more original and 'courageous' research by bridging academic disciplines – in this case generational, tourism and air transport literature.

Second, we apply a systematic approach to guide our inquiry – more specifically, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020; Page et al., 2021). It is a protocol-based process that provides audit trails of how the relevant literature was identified, screened, assessed for eligibility, and included in the review to guarantee the transparency, replication and quality of the process (Papavasileiou & Tzouvanas, 2021). In this way we respond to the "urgent need for consistency of systematic reviews in the field" (Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019, p.16).

Third, we offer an up-to-date review of the trajectory and the context of extant literature on the topic incorporating a significant amount of new research that has accumulated – or has been omitted - since the publication of prior reviews of air transport literature as it relates to tourism (i.e., Duval, 2013; Papatheodorou, 2021; Spasojevic et al., 2018). We therefore answer to Papatheodorou's (2021, p. 14) call for future researchers to "follow a reductionist/pragmatic approach by focusing on specific areas of interest from the 10,554 cases and/or comparing those to what is covered in extant literature (including systematic literature reviews) to identify possible gaps".

Keywords: Generations; PRISMA; generational differences; grey literature; airlines; air transport

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