Preface

One of the great challenges the world faces today is dealing with the ever-growing complexity of environmental problems that are ever more difficult to resolve, not only in a technical sense but in a social and cultural sense as well. While some are solvable technically, they all have to be acceptable socially, for if a “solution” is not acceptable, it will not be implemented. One of those problem areas is tourism, which means all forms of tourism, not just those that are often characterized as sustainable.

The complexity of these problems demands that we better understand what their “roots” may be, what causes this complexity, what resolutions may be available in the context of the times, and how we may implement those resolutions. We point specifically to the notion of resolution, as with complex environments problems never stay solved because the context is dynamic. When a problem is resolved that means an agreement has been made about the way forward, not that an answer has been computed in a technical sense.

And yet we have to be careful, in the words of Russell Ackoff, not to be solving the wrong things because that just leads to us doing things wronger and wronger. Building understanding of the tourism system, or more correctly the tourism systems, for there are multiple ones, can help us improve our ability to do the right things, and if we are working on the right things, even if the outcomes are wrong, then we will get better and better over time. For example, focusing on efficiency is not always the right thing. Emphasizing equity may actually get us to our goal faster than pursuing efficiency.

Research helps us get better and better.

So this book is about the research needed to help the tourism field focus on the challenges we face in its numerous subcomponents. The need for policy-relevant research is great; research that helps policy makers and decision makers to carefully and sensitively advance an industry that we see has a high potential to enhance the quality of life for many on this planet. We have emphasized here many of the challenges confronting the idea of sustainable tourism, which we loosely define as a response to the question “What should tourism sustain?”, which suggests an outcome rather than a kind of tourism. Up until the late 1990s, sustainable tourism was often viewed as the intersection of economic feasibility, social acceptability

and ecological viability. The world has dramatically changed since that time, as we argue in our book *Reframing Sustainable Tourism* (2016, Springer). We now see sustainable tourism as a component of a larger social-ecological system. That view has resulted in more useful insights and questions.

The world is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA – a term coined in the 1990s by the U.S. military about the wars in the Balkans), itself a response to the invalid assumptions underlying decision making that it is predictable, linear, understandable and stable, as Kohl and McCool noted in their book *The Future has Other Plans* (2016, Fulcrum). This complex world is best addressed through systems thinking, which we do not define here but is discussed in Chapters 1–3. To the extent possible, we have asked authors to use a systems-thinking approach to frame their research agendas and challenges within the context of systems thinking. While the chapters are not placed in any specific order, we recommend a good reading of Chapters 1–3 prior to the others as those chapters are specifically concerned with various aspects of systems thinking.

These research challenges are many, and we have collected only a few stimulating essays. We believe the reader will be informed by their content. The chapters range from the direct and practical to the indirect and conceptual.

Each chapter looks through a window onto the larger scene of research of the relevant arena that both faculty and graduate students will find helpful. To some extent destination area managers and marketers may find these chapters useful in providing background when meeting with scientists about needs and approaches in developing useful information. We do not include chapters on sustainable and ecological economics, which are large subjects that are helpful, we believe, to sustainable tourism, because they are covered elsewhere, nor such subjects as sustainable materials and transportation.

Producing a book of this kind requires a large degree of collaboration and joint production of knowledge. We first thank the 26 authors who spent a large amount of their time voluntarily to organize and communicate their thoughts about the assignments. We also thank the people at Edward Elgar Publishing for suggesting this topic and editing the final product. Of course, we would not be able to produce any of this content if not for the hundreds, possibly thousands, of scientists who conducted the research upon which the book is based, and the many practitioners who not only needed this information and used it but thereby also provided the initial demand for the studies cited here. They were highly responsible for providing the stimulus to conduct the research summarized in this book. Ultimately, the desire for tourists to seek opportunities for transformative experiences led to the knowledge synthesized here.

We graciously recognize and thank our families for supporting this effort; if not for them, this volume would not have been produced.

Steve McCool and Keith Bosak
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