

Organisational Effectiveness for Ethical Tourism Action: A *Phronetic* Perspective

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Abstract

This paper explores how small tourism firms driven by an ethical approach to tourism narrate their organisational effectiveness. The study frames the ethical approach articulated in the first-person accounts of these firms' owner-managers using Aristotle's notion of *phronesis*, that is the process of identifying 'good' actions consistent with living well and with an ethical *telos*. The research consists of a narrative approach via unstructured interviews with owner-managers of small Italian tour operators, members of the Italian Association of Responsible Tourism (AITR) and, as such, driven by an ethical approach to tourism. Data analysis combines features of structural and linguistic narrative analysis. The research findings disclose an organisational effectiveness largely rooted in a personal intuitive disposition gained by practical first-hand experience, personal knowledge, and a moral concern for the achievement of public wellbeing. Moreover, the findings challenge a business-centred approach to organisational effectiveness and question the dominant pro-growth, profit-oriented neoliberal discourses. These considerations can be used for setting the ground in tourism studies for a novel theoretical framework revolving around the ancient Aristotelian tradition of prioritising public wellbeing and happiness over capital accumulation, that further contributes to question market-driven capitalism and neoliberal globalisation.

Keywords: *ethics, small tourism firms, phronesis (practical wisdom), Aristotle, organisational effectiveness, narrative approach*

INTRODUCTION

Concerns with regards to market-driven capitalism and neoliberal globalisation have a relatively long history, as discussed in the Hardin's essay *The Tragedy of Commons* (1968). Hardin's essay focuses on the problems created in a shared-resource system accessible to individual users who—by acting independently in accordance with their own personal interest—deplete and ruin such 'commons'. The 'tragedy' consists in the inability of a critical

mass of individuals to act for a common good while applying technical solutions to problems that would actually require a change in the moral and ethical approach to the other (Hardin, 1968). This tragedy has become highly pertinent in contemporary debate in the context of the recognition that economic models prompting limitless growth despite the limited resources available on Earth results in societal economic and political polarisation, and the climate crisis (Kallis, 2011; Muraca, 2012; Higgins-Desbiolles et al. 2019). That there needs to be an urgent attempt to devise a form of development able to address economic and social inequities and climate change largely embraced at the institutional level (see, for instance, the United Nation Sustainable Development Goals), at the academic level (see Elkington 1998, 2020; Klein 2000, 2014; Bauman, 2000; Deaton, 2015), and within civil society (see, for instance, Greta Thunberg's activism for climate change).

Such debate on the failures and weakness of the free-market capitalism —as stressed by Hardin (1968)—is deeply intertwined with a reflection on the moral and ethical approach to the achievement of a common good. This study explores that debate, and interconnection, in the context of tourism. Tourism is a phenomenon highly representative of the modern era and neoliberal capitalism; its idiosyncratic embodiment of the tension between the addiction to growth (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018) and the potentials of a social force for common good (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006) requires special investigation. We look in particular at the case of those small tourism firms driven by an ethical approach to tourism, recognising that “ethical tourism action is not only about understanding what is good and just in and for tourism, but also about good conduct in tourism” (Tribe 2002, p. 310). By adopting a historical perspective to question the modern economy, its neoliberal evolution, and the ethical bases of a market-driven progress (Bruni, 2020), our study aims to shed new light on the conceptualisation of organisational effectiveness, a notion deeply rooted into capitalistic ideology and market-driven neoliberalism (Lewin & Minton, 1986; Cameron, 2015; Lambe, 2014). Organisational effectiveness is here explored as a construct; a more abstracted and high-level concept that is rooted in the values and beliefs according to which it is possible to define what is right to do and what is wrong (Cameron, 2015; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). This research frames the understanding of the organisational effectiveness of small Italian ethically driven tourism firms within a broader ethical-moral trend in European society, and explores how those firms' owner-managers conceive and narrate their organisational effectiveness.

We focus on the European context for its historical significance in setting the ground for the pursuit of the human wellbeing and common goods as main purpose of economic activities (Bruni, 2020). A role that is still evident in the current European debate and policy (World Health Organisation, 2013) and in the European citizens' attitudes (European Social Survey, 2015). More specifically we built our research on an Italian case study since both authors are Italians and being Italian mother tongue allowed us a deeper analysis, understanding, and interpretation of the Italian context, case study and narrative data.

In pursuing the above aim, our paper is conceptually driven by Aristotle's notion of *phronesis*—'practical wisdom' elaborated in the development and exercise of ethical actions in the pursue of a *telos* (purpose) (Aristotle, 1980). This interest in Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* arises from Paul Veyne (see Veyne, 1990, 1997) and Kwame Antony Appiah's (see Appiah, 2007) observations that the ancient world continues to provide a philosophical grounding for novel understandings of our modern societies and ethics. Specifically, this study explores effectiveness as a construct embedded into the system of values and criteria held by each firm's owner-manager, whose aim is to 'do the right thing' not just for but also *through* their firm. In his 'Nicomachaen Ethics' Aristotle associated the capacity of doing the 'right thing'—i. e. 'doing good'—with practical experience, commitment to a problem and a final ethical *telos* (Aristotle, 1980). Examining organisational effectiveness in terms of *phronesis* means exploring firms' owner-managers' action-oriented approaches to ethical tourism and the ability to apply their personal practical knowledge and experience to a set of different concrete situations and contingencies.

The aim of this study is therefore to shed light on a construct of organisational effectiveness rooted in an ancient Aristotelian European tradition that is as yet relatively unexplored in tourism studies. The significance of this research largely lies in interweaving an Aristotelian phronetic approach with tourism studies while exploring the organisational effectiveness construct. In doing so, the research objectives are, respectively, investigating how small tourism firms driven by an ethical approach to tourism construct and narrate their organisational effectiveness, and examining to what extent such construct chimes with the notion of *phronesis* as a 'practical wisdom' focused on doing the right thing by using personal knowledge and practical experience. The paper is structured as follows. First, a literature review provides a historical perspective on the relationship between economic growth, development and social wellbeing; discusses the concept of organisational effectiveness as a construct in tourism studies; and reviews the notion of Aristotle's *phronesis* (practical wisdom) as a praxis-oriented approach to action and decision-making for an ethical *telos* (purpose). Then, the paper presents the research design used to explore the emergence of an ethical approach to development and economic growth (and by extension to organisational effectiveness) within European society. This section also introduces the lens of small Italian tourism firms that are members of the Italian consortium *Associazione Italiana Turismo Responsabile* (AITR).¹ The research findings then disclose how small firms driven by an ethical approach to tourism conceive their organisational effectiveness in accordance to their owner-managers' driving ethical values, practical first-hand experience, personal knowledge and moral rectitude. These explorative findings reveal the presence of a concept of organisational effectiveness largely grounded in the search for the good life of a good citizen acting for the common good and public wellbeing.

¹ Translated as 'Italian Association of Responsible Tourism'

ECONOMIC GROWTH, DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC WELLBEING: A EUROPEAN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

This section provides an historical perspective on the relationship between economic growth, development, and public wellbeing. It so doing it aims to construct a broader overview of the criticism and resistance to neoliberal capitalism in tourism, whose theoretical roots are grounded into modern European history and its economic theories. As Bruni stresses (2020, p. 13), “the *telos* of classical political economy was to reduce unhappiness by means of reducing material poverty, increasing the wealth of nations”. This modern search for wealth and individual self-interest (see Adam Smith ‘Wealth of Nations’, 1776)—together with its moral and social legitimation—is well represented in the ironic pamphlet of Jonathan Swift (2010) ‘A modest proposal for preventing the children of poor people in Ireland, for being a burden on their parents or country, and for making them beneficial to the public’, published in 1729. The rationale of the modern economy and its constant seeking for profit and capital accumulation is largely intertwined with the axiology of the Protestant ethics of the nineteenth century (Power et al. 2017; Granovetter, 2018), as discussed in Weber’s (1930) seminal work ‘Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism’.

The contemporary debate on the weaknesses of the neoliberal economic model is rooted in the contention that the values of market-driven capitalism are misleading. In the European modern age, it is possible to identify two main approaches to economy, wealth, development and public wellbeing (Bruni, 2020). On the one hand, the English classical political economy, focused on the wealth of nations, economic growth, capital accumulation and distribution, but ignoring a social, collective dimension of wellbeing and happiness (Smith, 1999; Bruni & Porta, 2005; Taylor, 2005; Bruni, 2020). On the other hand, the eighteenth century Italian economic tradition—in continuity with civic humanism—focused on the achievement of ‘public happiness’ and social wealth, rather than economic growth and wealth (Loria 1893; Muratori, 1749; Palmieri, 1788). This interest is well represented also in France through the works of Jean Jacques Rousseau, such as ‘Discourse on the origin and basis of inequality among men’ (1755) and ‘The Social Contract’ (1762), which discuss social wellbeing and happiness, and set the ground for one of the key themes of the French Enlightenment movement. The acknowledgment that wellbeing has a social nature, and that wealth is just a material requisite for it, emerges also in the Cambridge Tradition with the work of Alfred Marshall (1890) ‘Principle of Economics’ (Becattini, 2015; Bruni, 2020).

In the second part of the twentieth century—besides Hardin’s *Tragedy of Commons* (1968)—Illich (1971) articulated the need to re-think a ‘one-size fits all’ approach to development, highlighting in that regard the potential of a society based on conviviality and consciousness of its limits in growth (Illich, 1973). More recently, “doubts about the moral value of economic growth and the ethical bases of progress have arisen, fostered by the recent (2008) financial and economic crisis, in Europe especially” (Bruni, 2020, p. 13). Mark Taylor (2014, October 20), for example, stresses how, “[...] with the emergence of industrial

capitalism, the primary values governing life became work, efficiency, utility, productivity, and competition. When Frederick Winslow Taylor took his stopwatch to the factory floor in the early 20th century to increase workers' efficiency, he began a high-speed culture of surveillance so memorably depicted in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* [...]"'. David Goodhart (2020) debates the importance of weaving head (cognitive abilities), hand (practical abilities), and hearth (empathetic skills) to contrast the global inequalities and social injustice of the 21st century globalised world with a practical thinking. Florence Noiville (2010, p. 18) describes generations of young economists trained to become part of a system moulded into the mind-set: 'Make More Profit, the Rest I Don't Care'. Serge Latouche (2004, vol. 11), in his criticism of neoliberal globalisation and market-driven growth, discusses de-growth as a-growthism; like a sort of atheism that rejects the worship of unlimited economic growth and capital accumulation. Such debates and interest in alternatives to pro-growth development and capital accumulation also echo other political and scholarly projects inside and outside Europe (Fletcher et al., 2016; Kallis et al., 2018). A common interest in de-growth, conviviality, public wellbeing and happiness can be traced in the South American conceptualisation of *Buen Vivir* (Gudynas, 2011; Escobar, 2015; Demaria et al., 2019; Everingham & Chassagne, 2020) and in the ecological economics of the *Joie de Vivre* from Georgescu-Roegen (Becattini, 2015; Missemer, 2015; Fletcher et al., 2019).

By exploring these criticisms of and doubts about market-driven capitalism, this study prompts a critical reflection on the notion of organisational effectiveness in small ethically-driven tourism firms driven. That reflection is based also on part of an ancient European political economics tradition, largely of Aristotelian heritage (Aristotle, 1980) that does not conceive development and progress (and by extension organisational effectiveness) in terms of capital accumulation, wealth and self-interest, but as an ethical approach towards collective wellbeing and commons (Bruni & Porta, 2005; Bruni, 2020). Hitherto in tourism studies, however, the alternatives to pro-growth market-driven approaches have been discussed mainly in terms of criticisms of neoliberal capitalism and acknowledging de-growth (Fletcher et al., 2019; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019), and the potential of 'moving away from capitalistic growth models towards tourism as *Buen Vivir*' (Everingham & Chassagne, 2020). This paper seeks to take that debate a stage further by applying the lens of an Aristotelian tradition to the critical reflection on organisational effectiveness in tourism.

ORGANISATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AS A CONSTRUCT

The idea of effectiveness is widely featured in organisational literature and its importance has been extensively recognised despite the elusiveness of a definition (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983; Pounder, 2001; Knox, 2002; Drucker, 2006; Oghojafor et al., 2012; Lambe, 2014; Cameron, 2015). The concern for effectiveness, efficiency, and efficacy was already featured in Adam Smith's (1999) *Wealth of Nations* and Frederick Taylor's (2005) *Principles of Scientific Management*. In classical and neoclassical organisational theories, efficiency, effectiveness and efficacy have been used in an interchangeable way, since the main focus

remained on economic productivity (Lewin & Minton, 1986). Drucker (2006), however, argues that efficiency focuses on 'doing things right' while effectiveness is concerned about 'doing the right thing', representing the match between declared goals and their achievement.

Effectiveness has been investigated by several authors not as a concept but rather as a construct (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983; Quinn, 1997; Drucker, 2006; Cameron, 2015). While a concept is an abstraction from observed events, there are concepts that cannot easily be linked to the phenomenon they aim to represent. These more abstracted and high-level concepts are identified as constructs (Cameron, 2015; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). Exploring organisational effectiveness as a construct means identifying and understanding the values and beliefs according to which what is wrong and what is right is defined. This, therefore, recognises that there is no single universal model of organisational effectiveness (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983; Fritzsche, 1991; Cameron, 2015). Rather, each individual's system of values provides the basis for preferences about choices and actions so as ultimately to determine what constitutes "effectiveness" for that person (Rokeach, 1973, 1979; Rescher, 1982). It is on this basis that Drucker (2006) highlights the crucial role of values in identifying personal and, consequently, organisational effectiveness. Schwartz (1992) identifies and discusses human values as expressing a motivational concern, where actions are taken to pursue motivational goals.

This study explores the construct of organisational effectiveness held by the owner-managers of small tourism firms driven by an ethical approach to tourism. In so doing it recognises the deep relationship between the owner-manager's personal values and their construct of organisational effectiveness for their business. The pivotal role of the owner-manager in small tourism firms' decision-making and management is widely acknowledged (Komppula, 2004; Legohérel et al., 2004; Ateljevic, 2007; Sampaio et al., 2011; Thomas et al., 2011; Bredvold & Skalén, 2016; Kornilaki et al., 2019). Facing constraints such as lack of expertise and a scarcity of financial and human resources, the owner-manager is usually required to hold different roles at the same time (Beaver, 2002; Burns, 2016). The management of small tourism firms is therefore strongly characterised by the owner's personal characteristics and objectives. This means that there is often an overlap between the owner-manager's goals and those of the firm (Sampaio et al., 2011), with significant consequences for the firm's organisational and strategic behaviour (Legohérel et al., 2004; Hemingway, 2005; Bredvold & Skalén, 2016; Sweeney et al., 2018). In small tourism firms in particular, non-economic factors deeply influence decision-making processes, behaviour, and management, yet a significant proportion of the literature still investigates those firms through a business-centred perspective (Beaver, 2002; Morrison & Teixeira, 2004; Verhees et al., 2010; Thomas et al., 2011; Burns, 2016). As a consequence, non-economic criteria and ethical values are usually underestimated, and the owner-manager's personal idea of success and effectiveness is usually overlooked.

PHRONESIS AS A PRAXIS-ORIENTED APPROACH TO ACTION AND DECISION-MAKING

Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* is here referred to as 'practical wisdom' (Aristotle, 1980) and is employed to help in understanding and interpreting the approach of small tourism firms driven by an ethical approach to organisational effectiveness and decision making.

Aristotle developed and explained the notion of *phronesis* in *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 1980), widely recognised as a pivotal philosophical work on ethics, composed of ten books and written around 330 BC to discuss what makes a good life for a man (sic). Aristotle's ethics understands intellectual virtues as central to a good life. Nevertheless, theoretical sciences and theoretical learning are not enough to gain moral rectitude and intellectual virtues and—consequently—a good life. It is actually the constant practice of such virtues, and the habit of doing 'good things' that lead towards a good life, and that should not be good only individualistically but also for the 'community' of people he belongs to—i. e. in ancient Greek terms, the 'polis' (Aristotle, 1980); this means that the exercise of doing good to achieve a good life is intimately linked to being a good citizen. For Aristotle, being a good individual requires a form of practical intelligence as well as a good disposition; thus, *phronesis* (practical wisdom) is the virtue dealing with actions and conveying the knowledge of the proper behaviour in all situations. Such virtue unifies reason, desires, and empathy to develop the capacity to act for the human good.

According to Aristotle's ethics, therefore, deeds and actions in the world are important to achieve a good life, that is a life in which one does good things. With regards to ethical tourism, Tribe (2002, p. 313) stresses that "ethical tourism is achieved not just by the intellectualising of problems but by good and appropriate actions". In the present study, such constant interaction between principles and praxis—i. e. practical judgement and action-oriented towards changes—is used to interpret how small ethically-driven tourism firms understand their capacity to 'do good things' while operating their businesses. As Jamal (2004, p. 532) highlights:

Phronesis (practical wisdom) involves knowing what is the appropriate or best thing to do in any given circumstances. It can be applied to exercise both moral and practical judgement. In the context of ethical tourism action, for instance, *phronesis* involves an ability to apply ethical knowledge to different concrete situations in order to make (appropriate) moral decisions. It is not an inert quality; one cultivates this wisdom through experience, practice, and repetition, i. e. habituation.

Understanding *phronesis* as a form of knowledge with an intrinsic purpose, i. e. as a 'knowledge in action' for an ethical *telos* (Tribe, 2002; Jamal, 2004), offers a novel perspective for exploring the construct of organisational effectiveness in small tourism firms that face many of the pressures and ethical dilemmas brought by the operation of tourism

activities (Fennell, 2000). This perspective is grounded in an Aristotelian humanistic European tradition questioning the ethical foundation of business activities that prioritise economic growth and capital accumulation over public wellbeing and ethical action for common good. While such tradition left a legacy in business ethics (Solomon, 2004; Dierksmeier & Pirson, 2009; Hartman, 2013), its implications in tourism studies and ethical tourism - except for Tribe (2002) and Jamal (2004) and Tomassini (2020) - are still to be investigated. With regards to business ethics, Solomon (2004) proposes a theoretical framework to examine an Aristotelian approach to business in corporations and organisations; Dierksmeier and Pirson (2009) discuss how Aristotle's theory of household management can be applied to the management of modern corporations; and Hartman (2013) debates on the virtue approach to business. Such Aristotelian perspective on business ethics yet did not find much space in tourism studies, especially when small firms are involved. Small tourism firms' management and decision-making processes—when not commercially driven—have been widely understood to be lifestyle oriented; rejecting business opportunity to pursue personal goals and private lifestyle purposes (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Skokic & Morrison, 2011; Thomas et al., 2011; Sweeney et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2019). In contrast, drawing on principles and praxis of Aristotle's *phronesis* allows us to reveal an understanding of organisational effectiveness, management and decision-making processes embedded in ethical tourism activities and the common good.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Our study is grounded into a social constructivism paradigm. This means that a variety of different and subjective meanings are attached to experiences and situations to make sense of the world individuals live in and they experience. Meanings are generally personal and distinct but are re-constructed through interaction with others and via historical and cultural rules operating at individual levels (Creswell, 1994). Drawing on an inductive process, we adopt an explorative approach to understand how small tourism firms driven by an ethical approach to tourism conceive and narrate their organisational effectiveness. A narrative approach is adopted as a strategy of inquiry to examine the first- person accounts of the owner-managers of such firms. This research acknowledges the growing interest in human wellbeing within contemporary European society as reported by the 'European Social Survey' (ESS) - a biennial cross-national survey of attitudes and behaviour providing datasets (www.europeansocialsurvey.org) and reports (Schwartz, 2010; European Social Survey, 2015) showing a persistent moral and ethical trend within European Society. Moving from here, we progress to an explorative analysis within the Italian tourism sector.

The research case study is the Italian consortium *Associazione Italiana Turismo Responsabile* (AITR) —gathering a plurality of subjects (i. e. tour operators, travel agencies, small hospitality firms, co-operatives, NGOs, and associations) committed to an ethical vision of tourism and coming together under an 'umbrella' association to promote their vision and achieve a number of common ethical goals. Within this pool of AITR members, we adopted a

purposive sampling approach to identify Italian companies operating journeys not only within Europe but also in developing countries and emerging contexts, and openly stating in their websites their ethical approach to tourism by pursuing ethical goals as poverty reduction, social inclusiveness, environmental conservation, authentic cultural encounters, fair working conditions, and Fair Trade. Out of the ten tour operators matching these criteria, seven accepted the invitation to participate to the research, making the firm's owner-manager available for an interview with the lead author. Table 1 provides an overview of the seven participants and their firms [Tab. 1]. Working with a small sample of participants is a common practice in qualitative studies adopting a narrative approach since this approach implies a deep and detailed investigation of the first-person accounts, unpacking the narratives to examine and interpret the meanings participants embed in them (see Bredvold & Skålen, 2016; Carless & Sparkes, 2008; Johansson, 2004; Riessman, 1993; Slekar, 2005). Moreover, about sample size and thematic saturation in qualitative research, Guest et al. (2020, p. 13) highlight: "our findings indicate that typically 6-7 interviews will capture the majority of themes in a homogeneous sample".

>> Table 1 - Overview of the seven firms composing the sample <<

The lead researcher conducted all the interviews; being Italian mother-tongue as the participants, the interviews took place in Italian. Therefore, the data collection and data analysis were performed in Italian and then the relevant stretches of texts were translated into English. The unstructured interviews took place via Skype being audio recorded and then verbatim transcribed. The transcription included all the meaningful linguistic details as pauses, utterances, and verbal emphases (www.ids.upenn.edu). Setting an informal, conversational approach allows bringing unexpected narratives that convey deep and different understandings and meanings (Trahar, 2009). Each unstructured interview lasted between 45' and 80'. The interaction between the lead researcher and the participant was prompted by a set of open questions aiming at stimulating the conversation while providing a soft guidance for it (Johansson, 2004; Riessman, 1993). The interviewer used open questions like: 'Would you tell me in your own words the story of your firm?', 'How have things changes over the time?', 'How does it work now?', 'How would you describe effectiveness?', 'How do you get things done?'. To encourage interviewees to be more talkative and willing to spend their time in the interview, the researcher also used a subset of questions, phrases and expressions that facilitated the conversation and were formulated in the form of 'Tell me about....' or 'Why do you think...', 'How do you...', 'How was it like at the beginning...', 'In your opinion, why did this happen...' (Johansson, 2004; Tomassini et al., 2019). The study focuses on the personal narratives and stories of firms' owner-managers. Since narratives do not speak for themselves and thus require interpretation when used as research data (Riessman, 1993; Riessman & Quinney, 2005), we combine a structural narrative analysis derived from Labov's work (Labov & Waletzky, 1997; Labov, 2003) with a

linguistic narrative approach to the structure of the text derived from Gee's work (Gee, 1991; Riessman, 1993).

Structural narrative analysis focuses on the ways the narrative is structured and organised, by emphasising the structures the narrator trusts—either consciously or unconsciously—to give meaning to experience (Smith & Sparkes, 2008; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). According to Labov's structural approach, narratives in storified form refer to a past event, follow a chronological sequence and have formal properties and functions (Riessman, 1993; Labov & Waletzky, 1997). We adopted elements of this approach to analyse the functions and structures of the participants' stories. For each participant's story, we identified the six key units that - according to Labov & Waletzky (1997) - compose a fully formed narrative. They are, respectively: a plot summary [Abstract]; information about the context [Orientation]; a series of events ending with a result [Complication]; a personal reflection of the speaker towards these events [Evaluation], the story's outcome [Resolution], and a coda that returns the perspective to the present [Coda] (Labov & Waletzky, 1997; Riessman, 1993). Besides a few stretches of narrative with a storified form, the unstructured interviews generated stretches of talk largely recounting opinions, feelings, and points of view. We analysed them through a different approach derived from the linguistic approach to narrative of James Gee (Gee, 1991; Riessman, 1993). Gee's (1991) linguistic approach and techniques examine how stretches of texts are internally thematically and linguistically consistent. Hence, we focused on linguistic and extra-linguistic characteristics of such narratives, examining pauses, elongated vowels, emphasis, pitch, repetitions, discourse markers, hesitations, and non-lexical elements. The analysis of these linguistic and extra-linguistic features allowed grouping the different lines of text revolving around the same topic into 'units'. Gee (1991) names such units *stanzas* or *strophes*; they are usually thematically coherent and tightly sequenced. As Riessman (1993, p. 45) explains: "Stanzas are a series of lines on a single topic that have a parallel structure and sound as if they go together by tending to be said at the same rate and with little hesitation between lines". The combination of these two narrative analysis techniques allowed the researchers to perform a multilevel analysis to unpack the participants' narratives, and to examine and interpret their understanding in order to identify common patterns in their making sense of organisational effectiveness.

FINDINGS

This section presents and discusses a set of main findings resulting from our explorative narrative analysis. Hence, the section discloses how the narratives offered by firms' owner-managers convey a broader scenario for their firms' organisational effectiveness, generally framed as ethical tourism action. While acknowledging the individual characteristics and uniqueness of each participant's narrative, the narrative analysis allowed the identification among the participants of a cross-cutting approach to, and sense making of, organisational effectiveness. Accordingly, the research findings are here organised under two major

themes, respectively: ‘doing the right thing’ for ethical tourism action and the role of practical first-hand experience and personal knowledge. The research’s findings allow us discussing their contribution to the objectives of this study that are, as stated: investigating how small tourism firms driven by an ethical approach to tourism construct and narrate their organisational effectiveness and examining to which extent such construct chimes with the notion of *phronesis* as a ‘practical wisdom’ focused on doing the right thing by using personal knowledge and practical experience. In presenting the research findings, all the participants’ names have been anonymised to guarantee privacy and confidentiality. Moreover, to assist the easy reading of the narratives, the stretches of texts are here presented cleaned from all the extra linguistic and narrative analysis details.

‘Doing the right thing’ for ethical tourism action

The findings reveal a participants’ negotiation of meanings that resonates with an ancient European economic tradition of Aristotelian heritage (Aristotle, 1980; Bruni, 2020) that values the social dimension of human-beings and acknowledging happiness and public wellbeing as the final *telos* of the economy.

Participant 1 articulates his idea of business growth: *the idea was to create a bridge to different cultures [...] the travel [travel industry] was one of the ways to escape from the commercial dimension through a reality that had meanings [...] because among the other things we chose not to grow [...] this means quality to us.* Participant 2 stresses: *it [the firm] began as an ethical selling point [...] it became a collector of all good ethically driven good practices, which deserved to be discussed and known and that followed our same principles.* Individual and collective wellbeing also emerges as a core interest in Participant 3’s narrative on the social impact of their business operations, and the personal happiness they get out of it: *I am overjoyed when I am involved in social promotion projects, in very difficult situations, because being resourceful can be very useful [...] I feel very useful there. Over the years we did very significant things.* Participant 5 articulates the mission and vision of his firm in terms of an open criticism for the injustices and inequalities prompted by the neoliberal capitalism: *the motivation is [seeing] how a different economy is built, based on something lasting that isn’t tied only to the temporary present [...] I mean, I would like to propose a totally different alternative vision [...] free from structural imbalances [...] because it is obvious that something is not working.*

Here, Latouche’s (2004) notion of ‘a-growth’ helps to locate participants’ understandings since their ‘a-growthism’ appears as a commitment to reject the worship of unlimited growth and capital accumulation in favour of an adaptive ‘a-growth’ (Latouche, 2004), conviviality (Illich, 1971, 1973), and social justice (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020) conveying an individual and collective enduring wellbeing and happiness.

Participants highlight the ‘ethical dimension’ of their personal construct of organisational effectiveness, recounting a connection between the right things they did and their purpose in doing them. Besides taking care of their own businesses, their organisational effectiveness is presented as doing good via a personal engagement with a *phronetic* attitude to decisions

and actions (Aristotle, 1980). Participants generally narrate an organisational effectiveness grounded in the exercise of a *phronetic* “Head, Hand, Hearth”—to borrow the expression used by Goodhart (2020)—while rejecting the “Make More Profit, the Rest I Don't Care” mind-set (Noiville, 2011, p. 18). The following quotes illustrate how participants articulate their construct of organisational effectiveness in terms of *phronesis* (practical wisdom), a virtue unifying reason, desires, and empathy to act for human good (Tribe, 2002), together with explaining their ethical tourism actions and decisions.

Participant 1 articulates organisational effectiveness as the capacity to prompt meaningful human encounters while travelling: *something effective is the relationship you establish with local people [...] So, focusing the whole organisational effectiveness on the encounters, on the authenticity of encounters is a really tough bet, but it is also what characterises you and makes you different from everyone else [...]*. This leads to phronetic tourism actions and decisions like: *we have a vast network in the countries we operate, of organisations, or individuals, or just friends, or guides who are our regular contacts [...] a nun who runs a hospital, or a Cambodian monk who runs an organisation that deals with teaching English to children, or a group that deals with human rights [...] we are dealing with individuals who are guides but they understood that we do not give a damn to see what is inside the temple and then go shopping. We care that this guide is able to translate encounters happening by chance, to visit reality and to talk with people, and maybe have dinner, not caring for the time elapsing but being there, right? [...] well, that small group of people who are our guides luckily understood the issue very well, and so very often they are the ones taking the initiative; they go around and find a project we knew nothing about, and they get involved, they take the group there, and, in the end, they are all very happy, and then that project remains in our contacts list, and we support it.*

Similarly, Participant 2 claims that: *for us, [organisational effectiveness] is the result we get with travellers and then with the community. I mean, according to what we offer, they [travellers] expect something and, conversely, our host community have expectations. So, for us it is important having always a balance between positive feedbacks from the travellers and from the local hosts. This because for us, as a tour operator, it is important to be effective both from the customer's point of view and from the supplier's point of view. For Participant 2, this translates into ethical decisions and actions as: saying no to situations that did not fit well in our visions. So, the tour operator that did not fit us from the perspective of our philosophy, although talented maybe in other things [...] and the same thing is saying maybe no to travellers who were not our target. So, giving up a customer who would probably come back home happy, but it would have been bad for my contacts.*

Doing the right thing in ethical tourism activities via business operations is also understood as being able to compete in the market system with tourism products that are both ethically constructed and ethically conducted, as Participant 3 stresses: *in my opinion, this is the key to success, in the world of responsible tourism. That is, to evolve the destination management company, on site, and to invest in them as well as trying to get them to adapt and conform to rules in order to help them competing with mainstream tourism [...] I mean,*

Firm 3 works pursuing quality and compliance with the national and local rules, and allocates part of the incoming money to social projects as well [...] If there is a community or three or four communities in a tourism circuit which are informal and with whom we work, we must send one of us there to have these people building a company. This is what we must do, I mean, creating a network and a supply chain that is consistent in all its parts with our ethical vision.

Participant 5 similarly claims: *effectiveness in our job is combining, in my opinion, these aspects, let's call them ethics, with the economic compatibility [...] effectiveness, is putting together, these two things [...] Working on tourism means contributing to an economy, it means helping in developing a different way of doing business in tourism, right? This is in my opinion the core of doing responsible tourism. I mean, finding a local partner with whom you share a goal that is not only the trip itself, but it is also a vision of how the development of its own country is.* For Firm 5 this construct of organisational effectiveness results in ethical actions as: *in Guatemala, I mean over the years we have developed together many things there. For example, we built a business on tourism, through a cooperative that have professionalised new people. They have capitalised resources which enabled them to buy a van and, today, for example, not only they have travels with us, but also sell services to others tour operators. This is a success, well, undeniable; it is a result that stems from a different type of tourism.*

Participant 7 expresses his idea of effectiveness in terms of caring about people over profit: *I mean, our goal is not gaining more but, instead, trying, thanks to possible exceeding revenues, to hire more people. So, why am I telling you this? Because it is about effectiveness.* This results in phronetic actions and decisions as: *contrary to every Ltd company, we [the shareholders] do not share our profits; the shareholders of the Ltd [Firm 7] pay their own work; I mean we, the shareholders, get paid by the Ltd with a salary like the other employees [...] This year we hired another person, after the one we hired last year.*

Participants' construct of organisational effectiveness is largely intertwined with the recounting of decisions and actions for an ethical *telos*, for the purpose for a good life achieved doing good things (Aristotle, 1980). As such, participants' narratives chime with an emerging interest, both inside and outside Europe (European Survey Society, 2015), in an ethically driven 'a-growthism' (Latouche, 2004) conveying 'Buen Vivir' (Everingham & Chassagne, 2020) and 'Joie de Vivre' (Fletcher et al., 2019) through ethical tourism actions. Thus, their first-person accounts depict a constant phronetic interaction between principles and praxis for an ethical tourism (Tribe, 2002; Jamal, 2004).

The role of practical first-hand experience and personal knowledge

In their stories and narratives, participants often ground their intuitive capacity to take 'good decisions' and do 'good things' in the first-hand experience and personal knowledge they

have gained through the years. The Aristotelian *phronesis* helps to locate this participants' narrativisation (Aristotle, 1980). Such theoretical lens challenges the mainstream understanding of small tourism firms through a business-centred perspective that has tended to characterise them as having informal management strategies and decisions, and as lacking competences and resources (Thomas et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2019). Through the recounting of past decisions and auto-biographical anecdotes, participants reveal how their personal and professional path has led them to manage their firms effectively while simultaneously conducting them ethically. The following quotes present the connection between their personal and professional experiences and the foundation and development of their firms, together with their ethical approach to tourism.

Participant 1 recalls how he built up his knowledge and expertise in tourism through his longstanding first-hand experience as guide and writer: *I had some trips on my own, then, in nineteen-eighty-four, I was offered the chance to be a guide for Company A [...] That was what helped my understanding of the world of booking, airline companies and what it meant - booking, customers complaining and many other things, right? This taught me the ropes. Yes, somewhat everything [...] However, basically, I am a writer [...] Company A gave me the opportunity to take the group to the airport remaining there to explore the situations that interested me, so I travelled a lot.* Similarly, Participant 3 links his past personal experience as a backpacker in South America with his wider understanding of how structural imbalances caused by a neoliberal market-driven approach can be addressed by ethical tourism decisions and actions (Tribe, 2002; Jamal, 2004): *during that trip, before which I did not have any dogmatic, scientific, nor theoretical knowledge of what responsible tourism was [...] I felt some obvious disproportion [...] we realised that something was wrong: for instance prices of tours that had no balance between quality and service or situations of obvious work iniquity [...] so we gradually developed, I have developed a more careful attitude about the services I was buying, getting more info and details than I was used to do [...] once back home, that feeling of discomfort never left me, so I tried to elaborate a travel diary and I started to publish it wherever possible, explaining how it would have been more correct to travel getting to know better the reality of the visited places.* Such first-hand experiences and personal knowledge, over time, led Participant to the foundation of Firm 3.

Participant 4 makes evident the connection between his personal experience, his passion and intuitive skills, and the firm's foundation: *Tourism, yes, was a passion of mine as well [...] Well, before I organised events, fairs at the radio. I was working for a radio station that organised concerts, so the organisational aspect was always present in my working history, tourism has always been a passion [...] then it started from this proposal by Subject A: the idea that there could be a tourism which is, let's say, ethical I thought it was, an idea that I liked for sure, but that maybe could also be winning. I must admit I don't know on what bases, I had no business plan, nothing so sophisticated, but I felt that that could be a way of growing.* Similarly, Participant 5 links his personal first-hand experience and practical

knowledge to the foundation of Firm 5: *I worked for more than ten years in the International Aid System with an NGO [...] in my field I have seen a bit of everything. I mean, when you work in the Aid System, the relationship [with the local partners] is always distorted since you are always a subject who is giving and your partner is a beneficiary always willing to say yes, to accept. Conversely, when you enter in a relationship focused more on the joint responsibility for a common goal, like realising and selling travels [...] the partner has a real motivation to give continuity to this relationship, to build something that lasts and contribute to a long-term development.*

Participant 7 recounts how his first-hand experience and practical knowledge allowed an intuitive disposition and understanding for ethical decisions: *look, a couple of difficult moments of crisis, when, of course, you must decide, and then, you know, my training as a guide helps me a lot; a guide who works in nature is used to, must make decisions. Thus, obviously, my training as a guide helps me a lot in my work, thus decision making, for me, is relatively easy. I mean I decide. And then, of course I try and decide with the support of as many people as possible and I hope I'm making the right decision [...] one of these, a thorny one, to which I can refer, is when they [another tour operator] advanced a very consistent economic proposal. Of course, after a couple of sleepless nights, the ethics or pride, call it how you prefer, prevailed and so I refused this offer.*

Exploring how participants make sense of their first-hand past experiences and the practical knowledge gained in their lives reveals a strong connection between such personal experiences and knowledge and the foundation of their firms with their ethical mission and vision. Facing many of the pressures and ethical dilemmas brought by the operation of the tourism industry (Fennell, 2000), participants highlight the pivotal role of their first-hand experiences to develop an intuitive disposition towards good decisions and actions, not only as business owner-managers but also as good citizens using a sort of 'knowledge in action' for an ethical telos (Tribe, 2002; Jamal, 2004; Tomassini, 2020).

CONCLUSION

A narrative understanding of the research findings allowed the exploration of how owner-managers of small ethically driven tourism firms construct the organisational effectiveness of their firms while operating in a market-driven neoliberal economy. Their narrativisation embraces the idea of a common wellbeing, which chimes with a growing interest within contemporary European society (European Survey Society, 2015) but which can also be traced back to an ancient Aristotelian European tradition (Bruni, 2020). These findings challenge a business-centred approach to organisational effectiveness and also question the dominant pro-growth, profit-oriented neoliberal discourses on strategic management and decision-making processes (Beaver, 2002; Burns, 2016). In contrast, small tourism firms driven by an ethical approach to tourism present their organisational effectiveness—through the voice of their owner-managers—as the capacity to do good things and to take good decisions on the basis of their practical experience, personal knowledge and ethical driving

values. This kind of approach is discussed and articulated as proper of a good citizen committed to addressing global challenges and inequalities, and willing to make a change. Participants' narrativisation of 'doing the right thing' resonated with the Aristotelian virtue of doing *phronetic* actions and judgements for a good life (Aristotle, 1980). The firms' owner-managers, through their 'good' actions and judgements, aim to achieve the good life of a good citizen who is also, by knowing and practising ethical choices and moral virtues in their business, able to guarantee a good life for others as well.

Small tourism firms have generally been understood as lacking managerial skills and as following naïve decision-making processes due to their lack of professionalism, technical skills and competences (Beaver, 2002; Morrison & Teixeira, 2004; Verhees et al., 2010; Thomas et al., 2011; Burns, 2016). In contrast, the lens of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) prompts a change of perspective since it locates organisational effectiveness in valuing the development and practice of ethical tourism activities, in the application of practical first-hand experience and in personal knowledge gained in life (Jamal, 2004). Moreover, Tribe's (2002) conceptualisation of 'knowing in tourism action' can also be understood as part of firms' organisational effectiveness, together with their intuitive approach and disposition towards good actions and good decisions for a final ethical *telos* (purpose).

The novelty and the value of this research consists, in the opinion of the authors, in trying to set the ground for a novel theoretical framework revolving around the ancient Aristotelian idea of prioritising public wellbeing and happiness over capital accumulation and pro-growth thrusts. Despite the wide use of the notion of *phronesis* in the business ethics literature (Solomon, 2004; Dierksmeier & Pirson, 2009; Hartman, 2013), its use and implications in tourism studies and ethical tourism remain still to be explored apart from the studies of Tribe (2002) and Jamal (2004) on a *phronetic* tourism education and the Research Letter of Tomassini (2020) on the *phronesis* of small tourism firms. Therefore, since such Aristotelian approach on business ethics has not yet found room in the tourism literature, our research contributes to fill in this gap, opening a new line of investigation and research. It does so by revealing the presence of an organisational effectiveness in small tourism firms that is driven by an ethical approach to the tourism business, and strongly linked to the purpose of being a good citizen, understood through the lens of Aristotle's concept of *phronesis*. This theoretical framework has practical implications with regards to the design of policies for small tourism firms, in particular in respect to the need to value the development and exercise of a personal intuitive disposition towards good actions and decisions for a common shared wellbeing, rather than capital accumulation and profit-oriented growth. As such this study provides novel insights into the ethical tourism activities of these firms' "*phronetic*" owner-managers.

This study has, obviously, some limitations that need to be accounted for. Firstly, it is an exploratory study based on the kind of small sample size that is generally considered

appropriate for a narrative approach and analysis. Secondly there is no claim to the identification of universal principles in this research, nor of objective truth. Despite the researcher's critical distance and reflexivity throughout the research process, nevertheless, this study takes place in a western Eurocentric context, as Italy is part of the Western world. According to these considerations, future research should be conducted to examine the construct of organisational effectiveness in small ethically driven tourism firms driven in other European and non-European contexts, enlarging the sampling and adopting other methodological approaches. This would allow further exploration and investigation of the construct of organisational effectiveness in tourism studies.

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