

Rethinking the evaluation criteria for qualitative tourism research: introducing resynthesis

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This conceptual study aims to examine the evaluation criteria introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985) through the lens of the current trends in qualitative tourism research. Emphasis is placed on the techniques of credibility, which are divided into internal and external. The findings reveal that internal techniques refer to the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations of data analysis based on the researcher–participant relationship. In contrast, external techniques pertain to techniques requiring external reviewers and sources that increase the accuracy of research outcomes (e.g., peer debriefing). In this respect, this study proposes resynthesis as a technique that compares the findings of a qualitative study with past research. Although this technique is used in systematic literature review and metasynthesis, its scope differs in that it compares the empirical study's findings with the existing literature in an attempt to enhance credibility.

Keywords: *resynthesis, qualitative research, credibility, transferability, generalization*

1 INTRODUCTION

Whereas quantitative research usually promotes probability sampling and quantified results in trying to explain the relationship between the dependent and independent variables based on statistical analysis (Assaf/Tsionas 2019; Creswell 2014), qualitative research counts on the honesty of the researcher on whether a flexible protocol is followed and that the interviewees' responses are not biased by the researcher's subjectivity (Jamal/Hollinshead 2001; Olmos-Vega *et al.* 2023; Williams 2000). Besides, quantitative and qualitative research stem from two different philosophical traditions. Quantitative research stems from positivism, which holds that independent of people's beliefs and viewpoints, which can be empirically discovered, an objective reality exists (Creswell 2014; Decrop 1999; Walle 1997).

In contrast, qualitative research stems from interpretivism, which holds that social reality is subjective, based on people's experiences and viewpoints, and therefore research is meaningful in understanding the subjective interpretations of socially constructed reality (Beeton 2006; Decrop 1999; Payne/Williams 2005; Williams 2000). Despite the epistemological differences between the two methodological approaches,

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validity and reliability comprise fundamental concerns of both. In this respect, Laudan (1996: 24) noted that: ‘What we need to provide is a way of distinguishing reliable knowledge claims from unreliable ones’.

This study sheds light on Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) evaluation criteria for qualitative research, namely: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, which continue to be widely used by qualitative scholars (Jamal/Hollinshead 2001; Korstjens/Moser 2018; Marshall/Rossmann 2011; Miyata/Kai 2009; Shenton 2004). However, this conceptual article places emphasis on the criterion of credibility as it is the most widely used in qualitative research (Cho/Trent 2006) and includes more techniques compared with the other criteria.

It begins with an overview of the evaluation criteria for qualitative research and then explores the generalization versus transferability debate. Subsequently, the techniques of credibility (internal and external) are followed by resynthesis, which is a concept that concretizes and specifies an already existing technique aiming to enhance credibility. Resynthesis compares the findings of a qualitative study with past research outcomes (of qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods approaches) that address the same theory (or very similar research questions) and highlights any common findings.

Although this technique is already used in systematic literature review and meta-synthesis, its scope differs in that it resumes and compares the empirical study’s findings with the existing literature. Resynthesis is employed in the context of an empirical study and is reported after the research findings (either at the end of the findings section or in the discussion section) in order to enhance the study’s credibility. Therefore, it could be described as a specialized brief review that compares the research findings with common results of past studies. In this regard, this conceptual study uses, as an example of resynthesis, the altruistic surplus phenomenon, which is a theoretical concept that has been rarely used in tourism studies (Paraskevaidis/Andriotis 2017). Finally, resynthesis and its contribution to tourism knowledge are discussed followed by an application of resynthesis in tourism studies.

2 AN OVERVIEW OF THE EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) evaluation criteria for qualitative research emerged as a reaction to the corresponding criteria for quantitative research (Nowell et al. 2017; Yadav 2022). The quality criteria of quantitative research are validity (or internal validity), generalization or generalizability (or external validity), reliability and objectivity (Jamal/Hollinshead 2001; Korstjens/Moser 2018; Miyata/Kai 2009). Validity refers to the truthfulness of the results (Creswell 2014; Iordanova 2017), generalizability to the extent that the results from the sample can be applied to the wider population (Kala/Barthwal 2020; Nomm et al. 2020), reliability to the extent that the study results can be verified if the study is replicated (Creswell 2014; Pratama/Wulandari 2019) and objectivity to the researcher’s neutrality as well as to the neutrality of measures and observations (Oliveira et al. 2017).

Respectively, the four trustworthiness criteria of qualitative research are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln/Guba 1985; Marshall/Rossmann 2011; Shenton 2004). Credibility refers to the accuracy of the data collection and analysis (e.g., ensuring that participants’ responses are accurately reflected in the study) and is achieved through various procedures and techniques (Beeton 2006; Creswell 2014; Fouad et al. 2021), which will be discussed in the next section.

Dependability refers to the consistency of the research procedures so that if different researchers repeated the study they would follow similar procedures (Silverman 2015; Willig 2019). In this regard, the provision of details of research procedures is helpful for the reader or other researchers to reasonably reproduce the same study (Silverman 2015). Confirmability refers to the issue of neutrality, which means the research process has not been biased by the researcher's subjective interpretations of data. In this regard, many qualitative scholars claim that reflexivity is another criterion that is essential in qualitative research methodology (Creswell 2014; Olmos-Vega et al. 2023; Pahlevan-Sharif et al. 2020). Reflexivity involves the process through which one or more researchers identify how their experiences, gender roles, socioeconomic status, cultural background and the power relations between them and the research participants influence the whole research process and outcomes. Therefore, it is meaningful for qualitative researchers to address how their subjective viewpoints influence and shape their interpretations. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), both dependability and confirmability can be addressed by an external auditor who reviews the whole research process from data collection to results (i.e., an audit trail). Transferability will be discussed in detail in sub-section 2.1.

However, the criteria of quantitative research cannot be applied to qualitative studies because quantitative research is usually explanatory in nature and in terms of internal validity examines the causal relationship between variables based on statistical measures and analysis (Jamal/Hollinshead 2001; Kitto et al. 2008; Kuehn/Rohlfing 2022; Mehmetoglu 2004). In contrast, qualitative research is exploratory in nature and usually employs an inductive approach while examining social phenomena (Bansal et al. 2018; Willig 2019). Moreover, as Willig (2019: 799) explains: 'quantitative research employs strategies for sampling and statistical analysis that allow its findings to be generalized to wider populations, whereas qualitative research does not provide a basis for generalizability (although transferability can be aspired to)'.

Besides this, the sample in quantitative research usually covers a large number of participants and is typically representative of the population, while sampling in qualitative research depends on the researcher's judgment and criteria to investigate informants with specialized knowledge or respondents who are easily accessible (Kuehn/Rohlfing 2022). Likewise, reliability differs from dependability. Reliability means that if a researcher repeats a quantitative study based on the same dataset, he or she would conclude the same results. In contrast, dependability refers to the consistency of qualitative research procedures among researchers, but it is not expected that they would reach the same interpretations (Willig 2019). In this regard, Miyata and Kai (2009: 70) note: 'dependability is more applicable to studies measuring less controllable events, such as those dealing with human emotion'. Objectivity and confirmability both refer to the neutrality of the research while the observer explores the observed, but in qualitative research the researcher might get emotionally involved and therefore confirmability ensures that the gathered data are raw and not biased.

Besides the criteria introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985), other scholars (for instance Tracy 2010; Whittemore et al. 2001) proposed additional criteria, but their attempts led to confusing results regarding the enhancement of rigor in qualitative research (Morse et al. 2002; Nowell et al. 2017). Thus, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria continue to be accepted and employed by qualitative researchers (Gill 2023), including tourism researchers (Zainal-Abidin et al. 2023), as these are considered to be more useful and reliable than others (Nowell et al. 2017).

2.1 The generalization versus transferability debate

The generalization versus transferability debate still remains an issue of great concern among researchers and constitutes a major shortcoming of qualitative research (Anderson 2017; Bryman et al. 2008; Cho/Trent 2006). Many scholars claim that generalization is impossible in qualitative research because the findings of a qualitative study cannot be generalized to the wider population because the sample is not representative of the population (Anderson 2017; Maxwell/Chmiel 2014; Payne/Williams 2005; Williams 2000; Willig 2019). Actually, this is mentioned in several qualitative tourism studies (Dybsand 2020; Minnaert 2014). For instance, phenomenological studies in tourism highlight the fact that their research outcomes cannot be generalized because their purpose is to provide a deeper understanding of tourism-related social phenomena (Andriotis 2009; Berdychevsky/Gibson 2015; McIntosh 2020). McIntosh (2020), for example, adopted a phenomenological approach while exploring travel experiences of individuals with epilepsy. In doing so, she employed in-depth interviews with seven interviewees and noted that her study findings cannot be generalized to every traveler with epilepsy.

In this regard, the sample in qualitative research mainly concerns case studies and is usually an outcome of purposive, convenience or snowball sampling procedures formulated by the researcher's knowledge and subjective judgment. The findings of qualitative research are derived from the specific sample and cannot be generalized to other contexts because a different sample might lead to different interpretations and conclusions (Becker 2017; Payne/Williams 2005). Actually, this should not be a problem in the context of interpretivism because different interpretations of a social phenomenon lead to a pluralist understanding of its several aspects (Grodal et al. 2021). In this regard, Gadamer (2004: 398) challenged the correctness of any single interpretation and noticed that: 'Every interpretation has to adapt itself to the hermeneutical situation to which it belongs'.

Williams (2000) and Payne and Williams (2005: 297) pointed out that qualitative research can generate 'moderatum generalizations' which are moderate and 'resemble the everyday generalizations of the lifeworld in their nature and scope'. For instance, Warren et al. (2021) studied place-branding strategies by interviewing nineteen senior place marketers from thirteen cities and realized after the data collection that the gathered data could generate moderatum generalizations. However, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is not a criterion addressed by the researcher, but it is the reader and the potential applier who decide whether qualitative research findings can be inferred to other contexts based on the thick description provided by the researcher. In this line, Kitto *et al.* (2008) perceived transferability as a process that critically reflects on the findings in view of similar contexts and current knowledge.

Transferability functions differently than generalizability. Through the lens of quantitative research, transferability could be characterized as 'inverse generalization': only a future study can corroborate the findings of a current one. In this respect, the qualitative study of Rodríguez and Gregory (2005: 60) on training of dining service student employees concluded that although their results 'are by no means generalizable, they provided evidence to support previous studies of training transfer completed in other industry segments'. Thus, instead of trying to apply the findings from qualitative studies to (non-studied) wider contexts, transferability might be better verified in retrospect. However, Miyata and Kai (2009: 72) noted that: 'Whether it is quantitative or qualitative research, it is important to recognize and identify the range

of application of research findings. After the range of application has been set, generalizability is used to evaluate generalization and transferability is used to evaluate extrapolation’.

While transferability issues are important for qualitative research, credibility includes the greatest number of techniques that are widely used in qualitative research. In this regard, this study places emphasis on the techniques of credibility and divides them into internal and external ones, which are elaborated in the following section.

3 INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL TECHNIQUES OF CREDIBILITY

Lincoln and Guba (1985) elaborated the following techniques related to credibility: (1) activities increasing credibility (i.e., prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation), (2) peer debriefing, (3) negative case analysis, (4) referential adequacy and (5) member checking. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation refer to the researcher’s knowledge, skills, experience and judgment to gather crude data while building relationships with the research participants and/or while observing their behavior.

Among these techniques, triangulation concerns the employment of: two or more different research methods while exploring a social phenomenon (method triangulation); studying two or more different data sources related to a phenomenon (data triangulation); when several researchers examine the same data sources (investigator triangulation); or when different theories are used while investigating the same data (theoretical triangulation) (Bui/Fowler 2022; Decrop 1999; Farquhar et al. 2020; Silverman 2015). Negative case analysis refers to the technique by which the researcher formulates hypotheses and then searches for disconfirming data. Whereas Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that hypotheses should be modified until negative cases cease to occur, Creswell (2014) noted that mentioning information that contradicts the study findings is more realistic (as happens in real life), thereby increasing credibility.

Referential adequacy refers to recorded research material (e.g., video and audio recordings, photos), which is regarded as a significant source of data collection that can be compared with additional data that occur during the research process. Member checking is considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to be the most important technique for addressing credibility. In doing so, the researcher shares a report of the study findings with some participants, asking them to review and propose changes and improvements regarding the accuracy of their views and opinions (Cho/Trent 2006; Erdmann/Potthoff 2023; Marshall/Rossman 2011).

All the above-mentioned techniques concern the researcher–participant relationship and the researchers’ interpretations, with the exception of peer debriefing, which refers to the review of the methodology and study findings by an external qualified peer researcher who provides feedback (Creswell 2014; Lincoln/Guba 1985; Marshall/Rossman 2011). Therefore, internal techniques of credibility refer to the accuracy of the researcher’s interpretations of data analysis based on internal research processes (i.e., between the researcher and research participants). In contrast, external techniques of credibility pertain to techniques that require external reviewers or data sources that increase the accuracy of research outcomes. External techniques of credibility are influenced by factors outside the study, which play the role of the third party and ensure intersubjectivity of results. In addition to peer debriefing, this study conceptualizes the technique called ‘resynthesis’, which is elaborated below (see Figure 1).

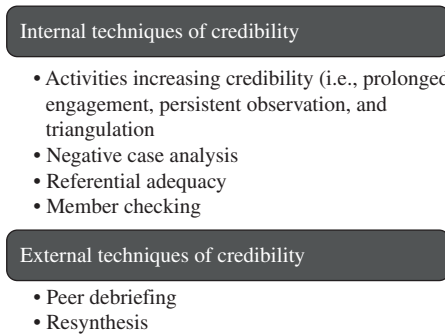


Figure 1 Internal and external techniques of credibility

4 RESYNTHESIS

Resynthesis refers to the technique that initially compares the findings of a qualitative study with past research findings of peer-reviewed studies examining the same theory and adds to the existing body of knowledge. This technique is already used in systematic literature review with a different scope. According to Xiao and Watson (2019: 94), there are two forms of literature reviews: '(1) a review that serves as background for an empirical study and (2) a stand-alone piece'. The first is usually employed in the context of an article before the empirical research takes place to guide the research design and identify research gaps. The second is an independent study of the existing literature that compares and reflects the progress made in a specific subject.

Resynthesis is employed after the empirical findings of a qualitative study (at the end of the findings section or in the discussion section) in order to enhance its credibility. Despite the fact that it has similarities with systematic literature review and dispersed references to this technique already exist in qualitative research literature in general (Charmaz et al. 2018; Shenton 2004; Silverman 2010 2015; Whittemore et al. 2001) and qualitative tourism research in particular (for instance Chen/Chen 2011; Cini/Passafaro 2019; Paraskevaidis/Andriotis 2017; Senbeto/Hon 2021), a systematic conceptualization of it is still missing. Whereas Charmaz *et al.* (2018: 420) highlighted the idea that 'critically engaging with previous research findings is vital for research to gain credibility', Shenton (2004: 69) noticed that credibility depends, among other things, on the 'examination of previous research findings to assess the degree to which the project's results are congruent with those of past studies'.

Paraskevaidis and Andriotis (2017) used published articles as secondary sources to achieve data triangulation by comparing those to their study's primary findings. In their concluding section, they provided a small synthesis of their findings with the past literature, but this was not provided in a systematic manner. After all, academic journals require authors to highlight the contribution of their research to the existing literature; therefore, a brief comparison of the study findings with past research findings is almost unavoidable. However, resynthesis is something more than that: it concerns a brief presentation of the study's findings that are congruent with peer-reviewed studies (which are validated by reviewers), and therefore these findings are more credible. Resynthesis shares some similarities with qualitative metasynthesis, which refers to a

method that integrates the findings of several qualitative studies dealing with the same research question (Lachal et al. 2017; Timulak 2014; Willig 2019). Their similarities refer to the fact that both techniques aim to extract more specialized knowledge from previous studies.

Resynthesis differs in that it concerns common primary findings of both qualitative and quantitative peer-reviewed studies examining the same theory, whereas qualitative metasynthesis comprises a secondary analysis of primary qualitative studies (Timulak 2014). Additionally, resynthesis is of much smaller extent than qualitative metasynthesis; it can be used in combination with other techniques to ensure credibility of a qualitative study. In contrast to metasynthesis, which generates new knowledge by comparing the findings of qualitative studies, resynthesis compares the findings of a qualitative study with the findings of qualitative, quantitative and mixed method studies in order to identify common results.

It should also be noted that the internal techniques of credibility are guaranteed solely by the researcher; even member checking is ensured by him or her, because the reader does not have access to the participants who validated the findings of the study. The same applies to peer debriefing. Likewise, despite the emphasis placed on reflexivity and relevant types (personal, interpersonal, methodological and contextual reflexivity) by qualitative researchers (Olmos-Vega et al. 2023), which are proposed to overcome the problem of subjective interpretations in qualitative research, reflexivity is also guaranteed solely by the researchers themselves. In contrast, resynthesis provides external evidence for the verification of qualitative study findings.

4.1 Resynthesis and progress in tourism knowledge

Resynthesis is a useful technique that monitors research progress by briefly summarizing the common findings of several peer-reviewed studies in a field. In this regard, it promotes the accumulation of knowledge. However, the accumulation of knowledge has raised debates between different schools in philosophy of science. Kuhn (1970) claimed that in the period of normal science, the accumulation of knowledge occurs within the dominant paradigm, which sets the norms of what kind of knowledge is acceptable for the scientific community. New theories and knowledge emerge as a result of scientific progress, which do not comply with the dominant paradigm and generate anomalies (Ritzer 2010). However, when anomalies start to dispute the dominant paradigm, a crisis takes place which may be resolved by the dominant paradigm or a new paradigm will replace the previous one (Kuhn 1970). Kuhn (1970) calls the latter a scientific revolution, and he noted that the new paradigm is incompatible with the old one.

In contrast to Kuhn's single dominant paradigm in science, Lakatos (1978: 5) referred to competing scientific 'research programmes' which are constituted by a sequence of theories, and at the same time are characterized by 'unsolved problems and undigested anomalies'. He further distinguished between progressive 'research programmes', which predict novel facts, and degenerating ones, which fail to do so (Callaghan 2019). Although Lakatos (1978) perceived Marxism and Freudianism to be 'research programmes', like the natural sciences were, he highlighted the fact that Marxism did not manage to predict novel facts. Kuhn's (1970) analysis focused on natural sciences as well, and he questioned whether social sciences had reached the level of acquiring a paradigm.

Erickson (2018) stated that, according to the interpretivist perspective, old paradigms coexist with new ones in the social sciences. A relevant example concerns

the qualitative study of Paraskevaidis and Andriotis (2015), which explored the concepts of use-value, exchange-value and sign-value, which tourists perceived while buying souvenirs. The two first values were sourced from Marxism and sign-value came from Baudrillard's postmodernism. In this regard, theories that stem from different paradigms and philosophies were used in combination to understand tourists' consumer behavior.

Scholars from different fields concluded that several and competing paradigms exist side-by-side in social sciences in general (Howard-Grenville et al. 2021; Ritzer 2010) and tourism studies in particular (Jamal/Hollinshead 2001; Tribe 1997, 2006; Tribe/Liburd 2016; Ren et al. 2010; Riley/Love 2000; Walle 1997; Wilson/Hollinshead 2015). Additionally, tourism studies are constituted by different and 'heterogeneous philosophical (including methodological and ontological) perspectives' (Belhassen/Caton 2009: 337). Tribe (1997) suggested that tourism studies are still in a Kuhnian pre-paradigm stage, characterized by the coexistence of different schools of thought, while Harrison (2017: 335) pointed out that the Kuhnian paradigm in tourism studies 'seems to lead to conceptual confusion and little empirical clarity'. However, even at the pre-paradigm stage knowledge is still produced by providing a plethora of world-views and empirical findings on tourism-related social phenomena by different social science disciplines (i.e., anthropology, sociology, psychology, geography, economics, management, political science etc.). The concept of competing 'research programmes' seems to be closer to the situation in tourism studies, despite the fact that Lakatos (1978) considered social sciences as being underdeveloped disciplines.

Scholars from different disciplines (see for example Bluhm et al. 2011; Yadav 2022), as well as tourism scholars (e.g., Wilson et al. 2020), claimed that qualitative research is strongly influenced by the positivist paradigm in terms of providing evidence of validity, generalizability and rigor. However, they did not propose any additional interpretivist techniques of credibility. Wilson et al. (2020) noted that qualitative research is not intended to replace quantitative research, revealing that these two methods complement each other to provide a broad perspective of tourism-related social phenomena. In this regard, resynthesis promotes the integration of qualitative and quantitative research outcomes into the body of tourism knowledge. However, if the latter is considered to be the first aim of resynthesis, the second concerns the fact that the verification of knowledge produced by qualitative studies is subject to spatiotemporal limitations. Common findings between a new qualitative study and previous peer-reviewed qualitative and quantitative studies (that address the same theory or very similar research questions) refer to specific places and times. Resynthesis therefore provides a brief report of the places and times a theory was verified (such as Table 1).

To summarize, this study attempts to enhance the understanding of how pieces of knowledge are connected. At the same time, it highlights the limitations of this knowledge and reveals that theories, which are verified in specific places and settings through qualitative research, cannot be generalized to non-studied places, even if communities in these places (of a region or a country) share common socio-cultural norms and habits. There is always the danger that another study in the same region or country using a different sample might reveal distinctive features (Becker 2017). The same applies to temporal limitations; the findings of a qualitative study that was conducted 10 years ago in a specific setting (e.g., resident attitudes toward tourism development) should not be considered as reflecting residents' current perceptions because societies are dynamic entities (Hollinshead 2006; Pernecky 2023) and socio-cultural norms and habits change over time (e.g., changes that the Covid-19 pandemic had on social behavior).

Table 1 *Tourism studies on altruistic surplus phenomenon*

No.	Study & year	Study period	Quantitative/ qualitative/ mixed methods	Sample (n)	Place	Verification of altruistic surplus phenomenon by residents
1.	Faulkner & Tidswell (1997)	November/ December 1994	Quantitative	397 residents	Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia	Partial, more evidence is needed
2.	Waitt (2003)	March 1998; September 2000	Mixed methods	658 residents; 178 residents (repeat sample)	Six extreme statistical local areas of Sydney, Australia (the three highest socioeconomically ranked and the three lowest ones)	Yes
3.	Clifton & Benson (2006)	Two months in 2001 and two months in 2002	Mixed methods	Interviews with: 60 local residents; 64 local residents; 30 research ecotourists	Wakatobi Marine National Park in South-East Sulawesi, Indonesia	Yes (residents)
4.	Hunt & Stronza (2014)	January to June 2008	Qualitative	Questionnaire surveys with: 100 research ecotourists 40 employees; 20 residents	Municipality of San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua	Yes, the majority of residents
5.	Lundberg (2015)	January to June 2012	Quantitative	528 residents	Three coastal destinations in Västtra Götaland County, Sweden	Yes, in two out of three destinations
6.	Paraskevaidis & Andriotis (2017)	April to October 2015	Qualitative	21 residents	Veria and Kato Vermio, Municipality of Veria, Greece	Yes

4.2 An application of resynthesis in tourism studies

A proposed example of resynthesis in tourism studies concerns the altruistic surplus phenomenon, which was initially coined by Cunningham (1996). Despite the fact that it comprises an alternative to social exchange theory, altruistic surplus phenomenon has been rarely used in tourism studies (Paraskevaidis/Andriotis 2017). It refers to a phenomenon where hosts tolerate individual costs for the broader community benefits. In the context of tourism, this means that hosts tolerate any individual negative impacts of tourism in favor of the community benefits generated by tourism development (Faulkner/Tideswell 1997). Thus, the application of resynthesis in a future qualitative study that would verify the altruistic surplus phenomenon in tourism would confirm the findings of the studies presented in Table 1. This table provides some interesting information about the methodology employed by these studies, the periods and the places these studies were conducted in, the sample size and finally the relevant findings. Therefore, a future qualitative study that would confirm the altruistic surplus phenomenon in tourism should verify the findings of these previous studies.

Whether such a table is provided or not, the findings of the future study would confirm the findings of two previous qualitative studies (Hunt/Stronza 2014; Paraskevaidis/Andriotis 2017), two mixed methods studies (Clifton/Benson 2006; Waitt 2003), and the results of one quantitative study (Lundberg 2015). The study by Faulkner and Tideswell (1997) should not be mentioned as it only partially verified the altruistic surplus phenomenon. The empirical evidence collected by tourism researchers verified the altruistic surplus phenomenon in certain places in Australia, Indonesia, Nicaragua, Sweden and Greece, with the first study conducted in 1998 and the latest in 2015. Certainly, it depends on the researcher's willingness to provide a more detailed analysis while employing resynthesis, but the fact is that an outline of altruistic surplus phenomenon in tourism studies is provided. In this respect, the findings of the future qualitative study would be linked to the existing body of tourism knowledge. This would enhance the credibility of the future qualitative study and at the same time it would reveal the spatiotemporal limitations of the generated knowledge.

That being said, the spatiotemporal limitations of the findings of Hunt and Stronza's (2014) qualitative study, for example, refer to the facts that the altruistic surplus phenomenon was verified: (1) back in 2008 and (2) specifically in the Municipality of San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua. Therefore, it is unknown if the altruistic surplus phenomenon would be verified nowadays (if somebody would repeat the study) because resident attitudes might have changed during these years, and this fact highlights the need for longitudinal studies. However, the above-mentioned five studies verified the altruistic surplus phenomenon in tourism and provided empirical evidence that enriched the existing body of tourism knowledge on this specific phenomenon.

5 CONCLUSION

Nowadays, it is widely accepted by the academic community that qualitative tourism research contributes to tourism knowledge progress (Andriotis 2020; Christou 2022; Frost/Frost 2021; Mehmetoglu 2004; Pahlevan-Sharif et al. 2020; Tribe/Liburd 2016; Wilson/Hollinshead 2015). Qualitative research provides deeper insights on how people attribute meanings to their experiences and how they

perceive and interpret tourism-related social phenomena, whether they play the role of tourists or hosts (Beeton 2006; Jamal/Hollinshead 2001). Likewise, theory building has been noticed by many scholars as one of the main advantages of qualitative research (Bansal et al. 2018; Bluhm et al. 2011; Grodal et al. 2021; Maxwell/Chmiel 2014; Willig 2019).

Qualitative researchers do not emphasize generalization issues like their colleagues using quantitative research methods do (Williams 2000). However, even if goals between the two research methods and philosophies differ, the provision of valid and credible outcomes is a common concern of both groups of scholars (Yadav 2022). Cho and Trent (2006) noticed that the most used techniques to ensure credibility in qualitative research are member checking and triangulation, and qualitative tourism research is not an exception to this. However, these two techniques belong to the internal techniques of credibility, which are guaranteed solely by the researcher (or the researchers) who conducted the study.

In this regard, this study divided the techniques of credibility into internal and external. Internal techniques of credibility include the techniques that refer to the researcher-participant relationship, and external techniques refer to peer debriefing and resynthesis. The latter is introduced by this study and concerns a newly conceptualized technique used in systematic literature review and metasynthesis, having a different scope in that it aims to improve credibility of qualitative research findings in the context of an empirical study. Besides, systematic literature review and metasynthesis cannot be used in the context of an empirical study because these comprise independent and detailed review approaches to the existing literature.

This technique, therefore, enhances the credibility of a qualitative study by relating its findings to an existing body of knowledge; findings that are congruent with external evidence are more credible. Thus, every time a new qualitative research study enriches the existing body of knowledge, a new synthesis is succeeded, and this is why this technique is called resynthesis. While it is common for qualitative scholars to compare their study's findings to the existing literature in the discussion section of their articles, they do not focus on credibility aspects; something that resynthesis does. Furthermore, resynthesis points out the spatiotemporal limitations of qualitative research findings because these findings refer to specific settings and times. In this study, resynthesis was presented in the context of altruistic surplus phenomenon, which has been rarely used in tourism studies. Thus, one might question how resynthesis could be used while exploring a widely examined theory in tourism studies, such as social exchange theory. Obviously, in such a case a more specialized approach of resynthesis is needed regarding the examination of social exchange theory in rural or urban communities or in developed or developing communities, something that depends on the researcher's judgment and the study's research questions.

Consequently, the relationship between resynthesis and other studies that conclude different results is in question. It should be mentioned that the aim of resynthesis is to identify qualitative and quantitative studies dealing with the same theory that concluded similar results, not contradicting ones. Contradicting findings in relation to a social phenomenon might form an alternative trend within the existing body of knowledge or open up new avenues for qualitative research. The comparison of different trends might lead to a broader understanding of a social phenomenon, which means that some trends could be related to specific places and settings. According to Popper (2002), contradicting findings of empirical research might falsify a theory or modify some of its elements. Different findings sometimes lead to the modification

of social theories (e.g., social exchange theory), such as the affect theory of social exchange (Lawler 2001).

However, this does not mean that social exchange theory has been abandoned or refuted by social scientists. Both theories still continue to be widely used in social sciences. In some cases, former theories are more suitable in explaining some phenomena in certain places and settings, while in other cases their modified versions are more appropriate. Nevertheless, nobody can ensure that when a theory is verified when exploring a social phenomenon that this theory can provide the most appropriate tool to understand the phenomenon under study. There may be additional unexplored social theories that could provide more accurate results regarding the same phenomenon.

To conclude, the outcome of this conceptual study, namely resynthesis, can be used by several disciplines of social sciences to enhance credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative research. In addition, it should be noted that resynthesis should not be used solely but in combination with other techniques (e.g., triangulation, member checking) to enhance the credibility in qualitative studies. Future studies might further elaborate the technique of resynthesis and its applications. Another challenge to resynthesis is how future qualitative studies that conclude different results could be compared and discussed in the context of knowledge progress. Nevertheless, more studies dealing with methodological issues are needed in qualitative tourism research so as to provide more ideas for accurate research outcomes.

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