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FROM UNCERTAINTY TO TRUST AND BACK TO UNCERTAINTY AGAIN

Because the future is inherently uncertain, trust plays an important role in tourism decision making and relationships. However, the selective and often poorly specified application of theories of trust in tourism has generated considerable research uncertainties at best, and confusion at worst. **Professor Allan Williams** shares his study, in collaboration with Professor Vlado Baláz, to address this issue.

TOURISM AND TRUST: THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

PROF ALLAN WILLIAMS

Whether a tourist makes a decision about a holiday, a firm agrees to work with a supplier, or a host decides to accept a guest into their home, they are acting with limited knowledge, because the future outcomes are inherently uncertain. Even where regulatory safeguards exist, trust therefore becomes essential to the functioning of societies and economies. Tourism researchers have increasingly utilised the notion of trust, not least because of the specific knowledge challenges resulting from the geographically displaced

nature of tourist activity, as well as the importance of digital spaces to tourism relationships. However, they have been highly selective in their application of the many partly competing, partly overlapping theories of trust from the economics, sociology, and psychology literatures. Of even greater concern is the way that ideas or measurement scales have often been uprooted from their theoretical contexts when applied in tourism.



FURTHER READING:

Williams, A. M., & Baláž, V. (2020). Tourism and Trust: Theoretical Reflections. *Journal of Travel Research*
Link: bit.ly/2NLW88C

This paper explores the approaches of different disciplines to trust, ranging from transaction costs and institutions in economics, to affect, cognition and identities in psychology, to categorisation, norms and social capital in sociology. These theories offer the potential to develop a deeper understanding of the different ways in which trust constitutes the often-concealed framework whereby tourism is able to function in the face of prevailing uncertainty.