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Future trends in tourism research – Looking back to look forward: The future of '*Tourism Management Perspectives*'

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A B S T R A C T

The purpose of this opinion piece is to reflect on the past of tourism research in order to envision its future. In this paper, the history and a selection of current trends are reviewed. By focussing the discussion on the changes in universities, processes of publication and tourism itself, the paper highlights some early scholarship which paved the way and shaped current tourism knowledge. The paper concludes by asking the pertinent question of where tourism researchers might be in the future, when they have to cope with the increasing demands of academia today.

1. Introduction

The time of handing the editorship of *Tourism Management Perspectives* (TMP) to Catheryn becomes a moment of reflection and questioning as to the future of tourism research. The journal is still a very young journal, having started as recently as 2012, yet it has secured a recognised niche as evidenced by the Scimago rankings for tourism and hospitality (www.scimagojr.com) where TMP can be seen to possess an impact factor in excess of a number of longer established journals. TMP has now become a journal of first choice for many of the authors who publish in it, and it will, I suspect, continue to grow under its new editor with the ideas that she will bring to bear.

The task set by the new editor of TMP was to examine the potential patterns of tourism research for the future. This paper adopts a position that the future can only be understood or guessed at by the nature of the past. People make their own futures – but primarily do so from the practices they inherit from others and the experiences they gain. It is these things that shape the way in which people can envision a future. So, this opinion piece begins with a history and a selection of trends that take us to the current situation. It does so by identifying what are thought to be key drivers of academic tourism research. These are (a) the changes in universities and the changing status of academics and the environment in which they work, (b) changes in processes of publication, (c) the change in tourism itself, which has grown in numbers and the different products on offer, (d) changes in the means of data analysis and (e) changes in information technologies. It will be noted that each of the changes becomes intertwined with others and none exist as an isolated component of the researcher's work. Having completed the review each variable is again assessed as to potential future directions.

2. How did we get to the current situation, and what is that situation?

2.1. The growth of tourism as an academic subject

First, there is the researcher's curiosity and desire to pursue an academic interest. Associated with that may be a sense of obligation based on the idea that research should not simply be a pursuit of individual interest, but rather be a means of seeking to improve the social condition. Unfortunately such notions have been challenged by other concerns since the 1980s – some of which challenges were initially well intentioned, but which have coalescenced into a series of probably unintended, but contentious, consequences.

As the economies of the post-second world war in North America and Europe enjoyed a long period of economic growth, universities prospered and for the most part were able to pursue their own agendas. By the 1980s the past impetus for economic growth was being eroded. The well-known Philips Curve inverse relationship between inflation and unemployment had given way to stagflation, interest rates and inflation rocketed as unemployment also increased, and governments in the UK and USA commenced a retreat from the welfare state as envisaged by the architects of state provision of education and health in the 1940s. The universities were then subjected to calls to be more open to those previously not accessing higher education – a call made in the name of better social equality. In addition, at the same time they were increasingly being perceived by industry and government as an economic resource for providing a more skilled workforce to permit

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industry to respond to the challenges of being more productive. As a subject, tourism and hospitality education were among the beneficiaries of these twin demands. More institutions gained university status, and these included colleges and polytechnics that had either a history of such teaching, or alternatively rightly perceived these service industries as the signs of significant changes in economy. Thus, to take but one example, Battersea College of Technology on its move to Guildford became the University of Surrey. Under the prompting of Rik Medlik and subsequently Chris Cooper, David Airey, John Westlake, Brian Archer and others, hospitality and tourism grew at Surrey. In the UK by the commencement of the 1980s, Surrey, Strathclyde, Bournemouth, Durham, Nottingham Trent, and Sheffield Hallam universities among others had established degree programmes wholly or in part providing tourism and hospitality studies. Indeed a number of individuals from that period such as Tom Baum, Roy Jenkins, Brian Wheeller and David Botterill continue to be active in writing and research. One common claim for the establishment of such courses was that tourism was a growth industry that required more skilled managers.

2.2. Changes in universities

To a large extent, this ploy was successful and students swelled the corridors of academe both new and old. The experience of the UK was also to be repeated in other countries such as Canada and Australia. In the latter former TAFE Colleges also acquired university status. Yet there were two long-term consequences. The first was that an emphasis on the argument for a need for industry orientation meant that tourism as a new and significant social phenomenon of the late twentieth century arguably failed to attract the serious sociological and psychological attention it deserved – a feature that may in part explain the attention given to the work of John Urry and Chris Rojek which reflected only in part the insights available to tourism studies that could be gained from the wider social sciences. This gave rise to the division noted by John Tribe of a subject torn between the pragmatic and the more conceptual, with, in the eyes of many commentators, an insufficiently developed conceptual basis.

Second, with the expansion of the universities there also came a change in university funding. The traditional university programmes were based on academic year long courses characterised by smaller intakes of students that permitted tutorial groups comprising six or so students. That model was far too expensive for governments when universities expanded in numbers and size, and the seeds for the present pattern of tuition were laid in place by the commencement of the 1990s. Needless to say, as is well known, the third impact was that governments, faced by such growth and inadequate funding, then turned to other mechanisms to identify who best to fund, and the current regime of research assessment exercises and journal metrics commenced. The latter was prompted by entrepreneurs such as Robert Maxwell who had identified the need by academics to publish, and academics effectively condoned such a process as it became a means of gaining both recognition and monies. In turn, over time, a fourth impact emerged. Academics lost the status of being professionals, and being a lecturer became a career as an employee. By the same token, research became a commodity for the advancement of a career, and further reinforced the role of journal metrics and the role of publishing. In turn, by the twenty-first century the trend toward managerialism in university structures was well established.

2.3. Changes in tourism

The third variable was the growth of tourism itself. As is well known, the numbers of tourists have grown almost exponentially and the impact of China's population beginning to travel has been well recorded. India is expected to follow in turn, and thus reports of 'overtourism' are becoming more common as destinations find it increasingly difficult to cope with the numbers of tourists. However, numbers of tourists are not the only features of a changing tourism landscape. Tourism today occupies a virtual space on the internet that shapes perceptions and expectations about destinations, and from the viewpoint of the industry, also directs people to places and disseminates evaluations independently of the more traditional modes of promotion. Given the potential of virtual and augmented reality in the very near future, the use of new technologies will also continue to shape the practices and behaviours that are the subjects of our research.

2.4. Changes in research techniques

The final variable is the advances in research methods themselves. There was a time when to download software such as SPSS on numerous 5.25 in. floppy discs into PC and to program using SPSS syntax represented a high level of skill. Today there are still programs that require skill in establishing the program parameters, and in addition researchers may be establishing their own routines using R, Python, Haskell and other such software. Where once a researcher could claim a sample of 200 respondents was a 'large sample', today one can take advantage of panel data and indeed populations that reveal their activities through credit card details, phone records and the records of GPS movements derived from smartphones. Our very data and the way in which it is analysed continues to evolve. Today we can track populations and that too has implications for researchers and the teaching of research methods. Apps such as Kayak give us predictions of future air fares, hotels occupy a hyper-space as well as physical locations, and new sources of data exist in multiple places. Additionally we tackle new means of analysis. A recent example would the attempts to undertake multi-group analysis for three or more groups using PLS-SEM.

The qualitative researcher is not immune from such quantitatively oriented considerations. Software such as NVivo, QDA Miner, Leximancer, Atlas-ti and others offer both help to structure an analysis of not only text but also photographs and video – practices that require knowledge of how to manipulate such software and ideally an understanding of at least the principles if not the algorithms that lie behind the software. Increasingly the qualitative researcher is from one direction being pushed into working with others as mixed methods approaches gain an acceptance, and from another direction, arguably some of the more interesting papers are based on longer periods of immersion into destinations as culture, ethnicity and heritage demand more than a shallow experience of place by the researcher. The researcher becomes part of the research from this stance to better inform the critical perspective espoused by some such as Greg Wilson and Alison McIntosh. And, galloping over the horizon comes yet another new era of research championed by researchers such as Noel Scott in terms of using respiratory responses and eye tracking to better understand the physical elements of simulation and responses to stimuli.

3. What might be the future situation – and is it desirable?

Of immediate concern to the researcher is the need to publish. To state the obvious, the social sciences are unlike the medical or physical sciences where findings can be tested and retested under experimental conditions. While the researcher may seek to be 'scientific' the social 'truths' are consensual and not absolute; they are contextual and contexts can change. What was once acceptable may cease to be so. The last few decades have seen, for example, significant changes in attitudes toward sexual matters and a greater acceptance of gay, lesbian and transgender lifestyles. However, not all social norms demonstrate such changes, and others tend to the absolute such as the general revulsion against child abuse. Important cultural differences continue to exist.

Consequently tourism researchers must also respond to changing norms as to what is acceptable. Earlier reference was made to the changing policies of journal publishers. Their response to the challenge of open access exists at different levels, but one strategy has been to emphasise issues of peer acceptance and a greater transparency. Today,

most journals have policies where editors cannot simply publish their own articles and refereeing must go through a review process undertaken by a third person. Increasingly journal policies are requiring more data including copies of questionnaires and greater details as to the research process. Many if these guidelines can be found on https://www.equator-network.org/library/research-ethics-publication-ethics-and-good-practice-guidelines/ - but increasingly journals are progressing beyond guidance to specific policies that authors need to adhere too. I have been suggesting for some time that authors should provide more information and data – and Elsevier like other publishers are now making it possible to provide data and other information along with a manuscript. Now that internet publishing is the norm, then the internet can do more than replicate a printed page, and in due course researchers can expect not only to be reviewed prior to publication, but to also have to provide more data. Equally, authors can anticipate that other journals will come to exist that provide critiques of papers previously published. Journal paper writers will become like authors of books, who currently not only have their manuscripts assessed prior to publication (by reputable publishers) but who will also have their books reviewed. The process of review will become a continuing process.

The means of analysis will continue to develop in the statistical and textual arts. What is today's cutting edge technique will become tomorrow's commonplace, as has been demonstrated by Grainger's co-integration, survivor analysis and (one is tempted to say – of course) structural equation modelling. It is suggested that the days of the so-called in-depth interview based on a small number of interviews of less than an hour are numbered, other than perhaps as an initial exploratory stage in a sequential mixed-methods approach. Such techniques may tease out 'top of the mind' awareness on the part of respondents, but salience does not equal importance or determinance when seeking to explain behaviours. Studies of tourism and its impacts will increasingly demand periods of immersion in the context that is being studied, and more ethnographic studies will be required if researchers are going to meet the requirements of reviewers increasingly schooled in the processes that research ethics and transparency require. This need for immersion also stems from the evolution of the tourism and hospitality industries themselves as they meet the demands of an increasingly fragmenting market centred on individual experiences. Tourism as the collecting of experiences will require the researcher to increasingly understand tourist behaviours and searches for authenticity and fantasy at a subjective level – that is, at levels where researchers challenge themselves and their respondents through participation and then subsequent withdrawal for periods of assessment that require reflection of their own roles as much as an interpretation of what is being studied. That, it is suggested, is what ethnographic researchers have been doing for decades.

As social scientists, tourism researchers will increasingly need to work in larger groups to better understand the complexities of tourism. The study of tourism requires the skills of the sociologist, psychologist, economist and environmental scientist to cite a usual list of requirements, to which increasingly one can add the skills of the computer program designer and technical 'imagineer' to borrow a term from Disney. This is not to argue that the days of the insightful observer are over – just as Dick Butler observed the changing nature of tourist destinations in the late 1970s to create the tourist area life cycle concept and Erik Cohen observed the different arrivals at a destination over time – observation of change will remain as being important – but observation is only a first stage toward understanding. The future of tourism remains in the longer term a future of angst. Already destinations such as Florence, Venice and Magaluf have reached stages where increasingly residents wish to impose curbs and quotas on tourist numbers. In Thailand, the beaches that Erik Cohen once described have become urban areas. In China, UNESCO heritage sites teeter on the edge of becoming theme parks where residents become employees to, in the future, be replaced by people with no intimate place attachment to the sites of culture and heritage. As tourism faces major challenges due to the increasing numbers who wish to travel, so parts of the industry will respond by creating places of fantasy and replicas of the natural. The features of reality and aspiration become blurred. Is the reality of the desert of Dubai its past two centuries of camel grazing, or is it the attempted restoration of a time prior to that as attempted at Al Maha? Praiseworthy as Al Maha is, it will remain only a partial replica of what once was the area because as the desert is being reclaimed, in all probability it will still remain too small for the original chain of food distribution to occur. Will the lynx and the major birds of prey be able to return?

These features will mean that the teams of tourism researchers (at least in the commercial sector) who are responsible for tourism planning will have interesting careers, and equally academic researchers will also play a role, and at the very least have interesting careers critiquing these processes.

4. Where will the researcher be?

But, and here possibly is the question, where will those academic researchers be, as the nature of universities change. In the western world, universities face several challenges after a period of sustained growth for more than half a century. In many developed countries, the school leaving population is declining in numbers while participation rates are no longer climbing. The international market becomes more competitive and indeed Chinese and Eastern European universities now compete with the western universities for foreign students. Government funding has not previously kept pace with the student numbers and resource per student has fallen. In many cases, government funding has come to be based on negotiated intakes, so as student numbers fall, so too will government funding. The funding of research becomes more important as a revenue stream, and STEM subjects attract more funding than social sciences. Will this drive the process beyond conventional metrics to altmetrics and h-indices, and the attempts to manipulate those metrics through the use of social media – both informal as by Twitter and Facebook, and through the academic social media of ResearchGate? Or will the system just collapse?

There are dangers in the university based research system. The careful reader will have identified in the above text, a tension of immutable opposites. How does the claim of greater transparency and the need for immersion in a research context fit with the managerialist approach of universities striving for funding in an uncertain world? To ask for more ethnographic approaches fits ill with the career needs to produce 'top tier journal' research articles. And as referees rightly become more demanding, the time taken to write that 'top tier' article becomes longer. The research assessment exercises based on five-year reviews or the tenure system that emphasises publication hang like the Sword of Damacles over each individual academic researcher subject to this process – and inevitably harms research when sitting behind a computer crunching secondary data becomes a means of career advancement.

So, where sits '*Tourism Management Perspectives*' (TMP). I believe that a journal such as TMP can serve the social sciences by providing a younger researcher a supportive place in which to learn to write articles. I believe it is unreasonable of universities to demand that young researchers need to publish in top tier journals at the very commencement of their careers to get an academic post. I also believe that in a rapidly changing world there is a place for replication research. Can we automatically assume that what was once true remains true? I also believe there is a place for a journal that will publish material about the failed hypothesis (assuming there were good reasons for believing that hypothesis to be true). After all, a contribution that illustrates that something thought possible is in fact false, is itself a contribution to knowledge. Hence I am confident that under Catheryn and her vision and ideas, TMP will continue to play an important role in the distribution of research ideas and findings.

Chris Ryan is the original editor of *Tourism Management Perspectives* and Editor-in-Chief for *Tourism Management*. He is interested in research methods, tourism motivation and behaviour and the consequences of that behaviour.