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Understanding Tourists' Movement via Survey Research

What this chapter will cover:

- The role that surveys have played in understanding tourists' behaviour and movement within and between countries.
- The significance of survey research, given its ability to collect socio-demographic and traveller behaviour data.
- The challenges that survey research poses to tourist tracking researchers, given its inability to collect accurate spatio-temporal data.
- The considerations that researchers must take to use survey research in an ethical manner.

Introduction

One of the most significant gaps in tourism research is also one of the simplest questions to ask: Where do different types of tourists go? Surveys have played a very important role in this space. They have been used to determine the characteristics of travellers such as their behavioural preferences, their expenditure and the destinations that

tourists have travelled to. Prior to the technological era, surveys were one of the few means by which tourists' movement could be tracked. However, the advent of technology has exposed the weaknesses of survey research. While surveys perform a very important role in understanding some aspects of mobility, they must be viewed with caution. This chapter will explore the strengths, weaknesses and conceptual outcomes that have emerged from this method of tracking.

What surveys tell us about tourists' movement

There are a variety of early studies that used survey data to understand tourist flows between countries. These have played a major role in assisting in understanding how tourists move within destinations and between destinations, such as in relation to international tourist flows.

International tourist movement

Early examples of international tourist flow studies include Williams and Zelinsky (1970), who assessed international tourist flows using data from the International Union of Official Travel Organizations. The authors noted that the survey data, while useful, was subject to challenges. These included double counting when the same tourists crossed multiple European borders, missing data from countries who did not collect survey data, and the lack of corresponding demographic data. However, they noted that despite the limitations with international survey data sets, there were countries whose international flow data was consistent and more robust than others. The authors developed a predictive model based upon the flow assignment model developed by Goodman (Goodman, 1963, and 1964) and argued that flows are patterned and not random.

There have been many examples of survey research that has resulted in further conceptual advances in our understanding how international tourists move through destinations. McKercher and Lew (2003) used survey research to explore the concept of Distance Decay. They conducted telephone surveys of Hong Kong residents who had undertaken an international pleasure trip, and concluded that distance has a decaying effect on demand for international travel – demand for