

Tourism Research: A 20-20 Vision



Edited by

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Conclusions: trends and advances in tourism research

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Published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited, Woodeaton, Oxford, OX3 9TJ
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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

18 Conclusions: trends and advances in tourism research

Douglas G. Pearce and Richard Butler

Individually, the preceding chapters have traced the path that tourism research on particular themes and in different parts of the world has taken over the past two decades and outlined some agendas for how it might develop in coming years. Collectively, the ideas, views and material presented in these reviews provide an opportunity to discuss how tourism research more generally has developed over this period and to reflect on the implications of these broader trends. The 17 chapters, of course, could not hope to cover and encapsulate all possible themes and trends. In particular, there is an under-representation of work from a social science perspective and, with the exception of Butler's discussion of carrying capacity (Chapter 5), environmental issues are only touched upon here although they have been addressed more fully in earlier Academy volumes (Cooper and Wanhill, 1997). Moreover, the literatures reviewed are predominantly, though not exclusively, based on English language references. Finally, the authors are mainly established senior scholars whose views on what is important, especially with regards to future agendas, no doubt differ from those of a newer generation of forward-looking researchers. Nevertheless, by way of conclusion, an attempt is made here to draw out and discuss some general trends with the aim of stimulating further debate and perhaps providing more focus for future research in this field.

Trends

Five basic and interrelated trends in tourism research emerge from an overview of the preceding chapters. First, the growth in the volume of tourism studies has been accompanied by an increasingly wide range of topics being researched. This is evident at various levels. At one level, Aramberri (Chapter 2) has discussed broader disciplinary approaches reflected in the split between the *how to* of the business-oriented studies and the more critical *why* type approaches of the social sciences. The reviews of Latin America and China (Chapters 11 and 12) also trace the growing diversity of research being undertaken in those countries where tourism research has been more recently established as a field of study, where studies on the economic aspects of tourism are being progressively complemented by social

and other considerations. The chapters in Part IV illustrate how new themes emerge as awareness of particular phenomena develops, for example refugees and tourism employment (Chapter 14), or the relevance of broader issues to tourism is recognized, as with ethics and knowledge management (Chapters 16 and 17). Within particular themes, the scope and coverage of research has also changed and widened, as is demonstrated in such chapters as those dealing with tourism and development (Chapter 4), tourism SMEs (Chapter 7) and distribution (Chapter 8). At the same time, as these latter studies in particular have shown, coverage remains variable, the focus has not always been on the most important topics and considerable scope for further research remains.

Second, changes have occurred in the way in which tourism is viewed and research has been done. However, the nature and extent of these changes varies and the overall picture that emerges is one of continuity and incremental change; there is little evidence of any major paradigm shift. Frechtling and Smeral (Chapter 6), for instance, reviewed changing methodologies for measuring the economic impact of tourism as limitations were recognized in existing techniques and new issues assumed greater importance. Perdue, Tyrell and Uysal (Chapter 10) illustrated how the conceptual foundations of the value of tourism have diverged among stakeholders over time. Yamashita (Chapter 13) accounted for changing concepts of cultural tourism in Bali as the phenomenon itself and perceptions of it evolved. Other contributors, such as Shaw and Williams (Chapter 7), identified recurrent themes with regard to particular topics. In other instances, issues raised echo those made at earlier Academy meetings (Chapter 1) and elsewhere. Foremost among these is the need for greater theorization, a point set in context by Smith and Lee's very useful attempt (Chapter 3) to develop a typology of theory in tourism and to systematically assess changing applications of theory in tourism studies. Crompton (2005: 38) argues: 'The seminal papers in the tourism literature are conceptual; they are not empirical... Conceptualization precedes empiricism....without it there cannot be any long-term effective research contribution'. Chapter 3 showed progress was being made in this domain but much more could be done. At the same time, Harrison, who discussed tourism and development against the changing backdrop of development theories (Chapter 4), called for more empirical work to test and substantiate theories and claims. His and other chapters (10, 11, 13, and 15) highlight the ongoing tension noted in Chapter 1 involved in balancing more systematic and theoretical approaches against case studies stressing contextual factors.

Third, little common purpose and no great sense of direction are evident amongst these changes and within this diversifying coverage. Although the body of tourism research has substantially increased over the past two decades it appears not to have been driven by the pursuit of core questions under the umbrella of any unifying set of theories leading to a structured, cumulative body of knowledge. Rather, we are witnessing an increasingly large and fragmented literature, or sets of literature, as studies proliferate in a largely piecemeal fashion. As was noted with regard to tourism distribution (Chapter 8), there have been relatively few sustained contributions

Chapter extract

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