

Understanding Tourism as an Academic Community, Study, and/or Discipline

Author Contact

Justin Taillon

Assistant Professor

School of Hospitality, Food, & Tourism Management

University of Guelph

50 Stone Road East, Macs 205

Guelph, Ontario, Canada N1G 2W1

Cellular Phone: 519-829-8123

Office Phone: 519-824-4120 ext. 52786

Fax: 519-823-5512

Abstract

Tourism literature has shown there is a disagreement amongst academics conducting tourism research as to whether tourism is an academic community, academic study, and/or academic discipline. These three terms are used loosely and change in meaning depending upon the author, source, context, and discipline of the author(s). The following paper identifies tourism's current position in academia using these three ideas of academic acceptance as tools to guide the discussion. Also guiding the discussion are ideas from tourism scholars and Kuhn's ideas of what constitutes a discipline. The discussion leads to a debate about "truths" in tourism research. Recommendations regarding the advancement of tourism in academia via theory construction in the academic field of tourism are presented.

Introduction

Tourism as a field of study is a new addition to academia. Until the 1990s tourism was not an accepted field of research as a standalone academic community (Jansen-Verbeke, 2009). Academics focused in tourism studies have written exhaustively on the merits of tourism and have used the terms academic community, study, and discipline loosely at times to decipher tourism's place in academia (Jovicic, 1988; Tribe, 1997; Leiper, 2000; Jansen-Verbeke, 2009). Tourism scholars feel a need to achieve acceptance in the greater academic community per Maslow's concept of self-actualization. Yet, there are barriers to tourism's recognition in academia.

Crick (1989) noted that tourism scholars were anxious to establish credibility in a crowded social science field. Tribe (1997; 2000) reiterated this sentiment stating tourism scholars were seeking academic credibility. This manifested in the form of a call for a tourism curriculum in to the early 1990s (Leiper, 1981; Crick, 1989; Gunn, 1998). Ways to gain credibility now include the founding of an academic community with a global network (Hirst, 1974; Becher, 1989; Tribe, 1997; Jansen-Verbeke, 2009), the establishment of a discipline (Jovicic, 1988; Tribe, 2000), or the distinguishment of a study (Popper, 1975). The constitution of an academic community, discipline, or study is paramount to establishing an answer as to what tourism studies currently is and forecasting what tourism studies is going to be.

Although unsubstantiated, tourism has been referred to in scholastic literature as an academic community, a study, or a discipline. Tourism is referred to in multiple fashions by those who study tourism as an academic field, practice tourism as a professional management economic tool, or study tourism as a component of their academic discipline, which includes

but is not limited to: Economics, Psychology, Geography, Anthropology, Business Studies, and Marketing (Jafari & Ritchie, 1981; Jafari & Aaser, 1988; Sheldon, 1990; Echtner & Jamal, 1997).

Establishing tourism as an academic community, study, and/or discipline requires an understanding of these concepts. This paper will delve into understanding the concepts in the context of tourism. Once the concepts are implicit there are established understandings within each that ascertain the current position of tourism in these three areas. These understandings will be applied to the study of tourism and guide a discussion about tourism as a field of research. Finally, recommendations for further advancing tourism in academic settings are offered in the recommendations portion of this paper.

Tourism Studies

Tourism, according to Random House Dictionary (2009), has three definitions: 1) the activity or practice of touring, especially for pleasure; 2) the business or industry of providing information, accommodations, transportation, and other services to tourists; 3) or the promotion of tourist travel, especially for commercial purposes.

The Random House Dictionary's definition is problematic because it does not approach tourism from an academic stance. Yet, dictionary definitions are of importance because they provide culturally significant points of reference for definitions. This is especially true of academic fields of study that are oft professionally practiced outside of the realm of academia as tourism is.

Within the academic study of tourism there are other definitions that have built upon dictionary definitions. One such definition is Mathieson and Wall (1982, p. 1), who define

tourism as: “The temporary movement to destination outside the normal home and workplace, the activities undertaken during the stay, and the facilities created to cater for the needs of tourists.” This definition has shortcomings because it takes into account only the physical action of tourism.

Franklin and Crag (2001) believe tourism studies are driven by policy and industry. Thus, a definition focused on the tourist and act of tourism is needed. Furthermore, the academic study of tourism has grown since Mathieson and Wall’s 1982 definition. Definitions that showcase the plethora of tourism attributes being studied are necessary. This includes impacts on host communities (McIntosh and Goeldner, 1995), the environment (Tribe, 1997), and even the study and empirical nature of tourism in academia (Leiper, 2000).

Providing evidence of the growth of tourism studies in academia during the 1980s is a definition from Ryan (1991, p. 6): “The means by which people seek psychological benefits that arise from experiencing new places, and new situations, that are of temporary duration, while free from the constraints of work, or normal patterns of daily life at home.” Ryan’s definition accounts for motivational aspects of tourism. Tribe (1997) disagrees with the definition because it portrays tourism as a centrist activity focused on the tourist. Tribe (1997, p. 641) believes, “Tourism is a wider activity with important impacts on host communities.”

Further complicating issues of definition within tourism is the multi-disciplinary nature of tourism. Definitions within fields of study that serve as components of the composite product of tourism, such as Geography (Squire, 1994), Political Science (Matthews & Richter, 2001), and Hospitality Management (Kim, Savage, Howey, and Hoof, 2009), utilize definitions that focus on different aspects of tourism.

Squire (1994), a geographer, believes tourism is a field that pivots from geography to other fields of study because tourism is an activity that focuses on spatial behavior and spatial organization. Kim, Savage, Howey, and Hoof (2009, p. 1) believe hospitality management and tourism are linked more than any other two sciences because, "Tourism depends in part on the services provided by the hospitality industry, while the hospitality industry derives economic benefit from selling services to tourists." Matthews and Richter (2001) state that tourism is a sub-discipline of Political Science for two reasons: 1) tourism and political science do not have clearly defined boundaries and they overlap to a point where one cannot tell where on social science begins and the other ends and 2) social emphases in tourism research have changed to include politics and thus, as tourism is not a discipline, it is a sub-discipline of political science.

Within tourism there are definitions specific to certain typologies of tourism, such as sustainable tourism, eco-tourism, mass tourism, event tourism. These definitions have largely accounted for changes in the academic tourism landscape as cities, companies, organizations, etc. choose definitions of tourism that best suit their marketing purposes (Hunt, & Layne, 1991). The trend towards specificity is an important distinction in that it is an instance of tourism practitioners driving tourism in academia.

Another similar take on the aforementioned specificity of definitions is that the preciseness and importance of definitions has become of greater importance as tourism research has become increasingly economically and socially driven (Hunt & Layne, 1991; Walle, 1997). Specifically, Walle (1997, p. 525) interprets Hunt and Layne's (1991) research conclusion to be: "Economic importance led to the eclipse of fuzzy-minded thinking."

The bottom line is that a definition for tourism studies has not been established. This is in no small part due to the multi-disciplinary nature of tourism studies. This may seemingly be a point of semantics, but a field of study that does not have an agreed upon definition is problematic.

Furthermore, tourism scholars are continuing to grow the base of epistemological knowledge in tourism research. The creation of a definition in an oft-changing environment is difficult. For example, Franklin and Cragg (2001) question whether tourism research is keeping pace with tourism practitioners. Ateljevic, Pritchard, and Morgan (2007) believe a shift resulting in a critical turn in tourism research and study is currently being undergone in academic tourism studies. This shift is seen as a paradigm swing that emits symptoms in the form of an alteration from post-positivism to qualitative data methods, “foregrounds the emotional dynamics of research relations and explores the personal, and the political and the situated nature of research journeys” (Ateljevic, Pritchard, and Morgan, 2007, p. 1).

It is also necessary to note that fields of study, disciplines according to Tribe (1997), have their own acronyms, verbiage, and classifications (Ramsden, 1997).

The multi-disciplinary field of tourism has gained momentum as a field of academic research. Tourism is a composite academic community consisting of scholars from multiple disciplines. Tourism research continues to be performed and published outside of the tourism literature. Academic communities performing tourism research have accepted tourism as an academic study but not as a standalone academic product (Matthews, & Richter, 1991; Squire, 1994; Kim, Savage, Howey, & Hoof, 2009). In fact, there are authors who find tourism as a

concept blasphemous and in bad taste (Fowles, 1978), culturally disdainful (Mitford, 1959), and evil (Mings, 1978).

There is no agreed upon status of tourism's current positioning in regards to it as a discipline, study, or academic network. Before arguing what tourism is going to become, or already is, an understanding of its position in academia must be understood.

Tourism as an academic community

Tourism is often referred to as an academic community (Hirst, 1974; Becher, 1989; Tribe, 1997; Leiper, 2000; Jansen-Verbeke, 2009). This is not necessarily intended to be in lieu of tourism being a discipline or academic study. Although these three terms are used interchangeably and loosely, they imply three different positions on tourism as a field of academic inquiry.

Jansen-Verbeke (2009, para. 5) refers to tourism in the 1980s as being an academic community and explains, "There was a growing awareness of the economic potential of tourism, its positive and negative impact on different types of location and the need for local and national authorities to manage and monitor it. Despite this development, tourism was not yet regarded as a scientific field of research in its own right, or as a stakeholder in policymaking." The academic community of tourism necessitates a level of social awareness but little acceptance in academia judging by this constitution of academic community.

Becher (1989) agrees with Myriam Jansen-Verbeke that tourism in academia in the 1980s was an academic community. Belcher believes the field was multi-disciplinary and viewed as a business entity with professional research in management being paramount.

Tourism in academia involved the investigation of tourism and the construction of merely a preliminary body of knowledge and was secondary to practicing, even in academic circles.

Tribe (1997) believes tourism in academia remained consistent in the 1990s with what Becher and Jansen-Verbeke witnessed in the 1980s. Tribe (1997, p. 640) states, "First, tourism is a phenomenon in the external world." This is what Tribe unambiguously calls "tourism". Tribe (1997, p. 640) then defines tourism in the "academic community": "... whose business involves the investigation of tourism and the construction of a body of knowledge." Tribe (1997, p. 640) is explicit and states, "This dimension of tourism will be referred to as the study of tourism." Tribe (1997; 2000; 2006), unlike Jansen-Verbeke and Becher, states that tourism in academia is an "academic community" and will never be a discipline.

There is little doubt that tourism exists as an academic community within tourism researchers. This does not prevent researchers from other disciplines from claiming that tourism is a by-product of their discipline and field of research. If tourism were established as a unique academic study, rather than a product to study in other disciplines, then acceptance in the academic community, outside of the tourism community, would be established.

Tourism as an academic study

Tribe (1997) refers to tourism as an "academic study" and as an "academic" community". He used the terms loosely, albeit not inter-changeably. Tribe explains tourism studies as a study performed by a research community. Tribe (1997, p. 642) defines tourism studies as, "...much less than the activity that it describes. It is essentially in the business of making generalizations about the phenomenal world of tourism and the packaging of theories."

Tribe (1997, p. 639) furthers this thought-process by stating, "While propositional knowledge characterizes tourism as an academic community, procedural knowledge is a key part of the professional practice of tourism management

Shneider (2009, p. 217) describes four classifications Kuhn (1962) documents as paramount to deciphering the position of an academic study. The four phases showcase the natural progression sciences take as they evolve from new phenomena to discipline:

1. Scientists at stage one introduce new objects and phenomena as subject matter for a new scientific discipline. To do this they have to introduce a new language adequately describing the subject matter.
2. At stage two, scientists develop a toolbox of methods and techniques for the new discipline. Owing to this advancement in methodology, the spectrum of objects and phenomena that fall into the realm of the new science are further understood at this stage.
3. Most of the specific knowledge is generated at the third stage, at which the highest number of original research publications is generated. The majority of third-stage investigation is based on the initial application of new research methods to objects and/or phenomena.
4. The purpose of the fourth stage is to maintain and pass on scientific knowledge generated during the first three stages. Groundbreaking new discoveries are not made at this stage. However, new ways to present scientific information are generated, and crucial revisions are often made of the role of the discipline within the constantly evolving scientific environment.

Phase One states a unified language is a necessity. There is no definitive definition offered for “tourism” as an academic field of study. The theories and literature is disjointed as previously established. Although this is slowly changing, there are still terminology issues to overcome.

Phase Two necessitates methods, techniques, and theories. Theories continue to be pulled from a variety of previously mentioned disciplines, but tourism-specific theories are not a driving force in tourism studies. The theories are disjointed and stem from utilization in other disciplines.

Phases Three and Four are not yet possible due to the problematic qualities associated with Phases One and Two. Thus, according to Shneider (2009) and Kuhn (1962) tourism is a study and not a discipline. None the less, a look into the claims that tourism is a discipline is warranted.

Tourism as a discipline

Recently Tribe (2006) referred to disciplines as cornerstones of truth that screen the framing of research. Tribe believes that if tourism became a discipline it would work as a tyrannical force by disciplining knowledge creation in the field. Tribe (2006) believes tourism remains an academic community. Furthermore, he refers to Sayer (1992) and Kuhn (1962) when questioning tourism as a stage in the discipline process (Tribe 1997, 2006).

Leiper (2000, p. 805) disagrees with the aforementioned assessment of tourism as an academic community and states Tribe’s “discussion is thought-provoking, but the arguments

and conclusions are debatable.” Leiper does not agree that Tribe can dismiss tourism as a potential discipline.

Within the academic field of tourism there are contrasting viewpoints in regards to tourism as a discipline. Jovicic (1988) argues for Tourismology and Leiper (1981) argues for tourology, both of which are terms describing tourism as a distinct discipline. Tribe (1997) argues against this and states tourism is an indiscipline and is not capable of being a discipline. There are indicators for whether tourism is a discipline or not. Tribe (1997) believes tourism is not a discipline due to epistemological shortcomings. Leiper (2000) bases whether tourism is a discipline or not on social acceptance of tourism as a discipline. Jovicic (1988) calls for the creation of a discipline because tourism research is currently fragmented. He believes tourism should be a discipline and can be one through theory assimilation under a single academic entity, or discipline.

Both tourism as a discipline and tourism as an indiscipline are approaches that have gained momentum while deviating away from each other. Those stating tourism can and should stand alone as a field of study (Rogozinski, 1985; Jovicic, 1988; Comic, 1989) and those who disagree and believe tourism is a collection of ideas from other disciplines (Jafari, 1990; Pearce, 1993) continue to stand in contrast. Confounding the disciplinary question is a third option. Echtner and Jamal (1997) believe tourism could be in the beginning stages of becoming a discipline, although it is not yet a discipline.

The disagreements over whether tourism is a discipline, or even whether it could become a discipline, are founded on a multitude of different opinions as to what constitutes a discipline.

Kuhn (1962) offers a further indication of what constitutes a discipline. He states that studies without past scientific achievements cannot be a discipline. He categorizes past scientific achievements as extraordinary accomplishments accepted by society as being unique to a field. This means social acceptance is necessary. Kuhn offers an example of his suggestion. Kuhn (1962, p. 10) writes that if textbooks are published for use by “elementary students” and taught in primary schools, such as history, physics, or mathematics, then the study is a discipline. Kuhn refers to studies that are disciplines by his indicators as “normal science”.

Tourism is not “normal science” by Kuhn’s standards. Kuhn’s indicators that lead to “normal science” are not the only optioned methods for discipline building though. There are other indicators for disciplines. For example, a discipline must have an accepted definition according to Tribe (1997). Tourism does not have a definition that is agreed upon as exemplified in the “Tourism Studies” section of this paper.

Disciplines must have their own unique theories, according to Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan (2007), Kuhn (1962), and Tribe (1997). The academic field of tourism borrows theories from existing disciplines. These disciplines are varied and include Anthropology, Geography, Sociology, Psychology, Philosophy, Economics, Political Sciences, and Law (Sheldon, 1990). Elements of tourism achievements and theory are split amongst the aforementioned academic disciplines.

The fragmented nature of existing knowledge in tourism ruins opportunities for all three indicators of disciplines mentioned to this point: a discipline must have social buy-in, its own theories, and an accepted definition. The fragmentation of tourism in academia must be understood if an understanding of tourism as a discipline is to be understood.

Seminal authors of tourism foray into tourism studies, but are steeped in different disciplines, and thus can have difficulty relating to each other. According to Jamal (personal communication, 2009) these seminal authors are studying tourism in relation to their field of interest, such as sociology for John Urry or landscape architecture for Dean MacCannell. Both of these authors published empirical data in tourism, but remain enveloped in their primary fields.

Empirical articles published in a discipline are integral parts of theory building in a field of study (Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan, 2007). Chalmers (1999) writes that empirical publications containing theory building begin with authors utilizing inductive reasoning that contains observations unique to the author's frame of reference. Theory building originating with authors from dissimilar fields fragments the tourism industry's publications. When authors publish without knowledge of similar work done outside their discipline, but within the academic field of tourism, there are pitfalls within tourism in regards to theory building.

The "Truth" about tourism in academia

John Tribe believes the academic tourism "truth" is untold. The beginning stages of this idea are evidenced in his 1997 publication "The Indiscipline of Tourism". Tribe (1997) discusses a lack of theoretical underpinning in the field of tourism. He believes the lack of theory harms the field. The untold "truth" in tourism is the focal point of his 2006 publication "The Truth About Tourism". Although his point is not unfounded, his argument for the lack of "truth" in the field lacks credibility. He fails to build a succinct case for his idea. Tribe overlooks important arguments against and within his methodology. He distorts social constructivisms in tourism and molds them to fit his argument.

To understand Tribe's arguments' shortcomings one must understand his approach and what the assumptions to his approach mean. For example, Tribe states he is taking a social constructivist approach. Berger and Luckmann produced the original seminal text of social constructivism according to NYU Philosophy professor Paul Boghossian (2001). In this text Berger and Luckmann (1966) identify the Social Construction of Reality to mean that persons, when together over time, will begin to mentally replicate each other's actions, thoughts, and collective behavior. These collective behaviors are incorporated into their being.

Researchers of social constructivism have classified what it means to identify "truth" in an academic field of study. According to Burr (1995) a social constructivist approach to identifying "truth" includes the consideration of "influences that impinge upon how, and what, knowledge is assembled" (Tribe, 2006, p. 361). Building upon the social constructivist approach Tribe has taken to establish there is not "truth" in tourism I will provide evidence there could be "truth" in tourism.

There are so many disciplines delving into tourism research that researchers in the field of tourism do not have the ability to build a unifying paradigm (Tribe, 1997; Tribe, 2006). Tribe (2006, p. 367) states Franklin and Crang (2001) began a new journal, *Tourist Studies*, because they felt "an angle of research...had been overlooked." Tribe (2006) feels there are many angles and fields of research involved in tourism studies, which is the reason for the lack of a unifying paradigm, but he also feels that to describe the state of research in a study he does not need to look outside the realm of articles classified as "tourism" by the CABI Publishing Database. These are not the only methodological problem in Tribe's 2006 study.

An author's frame of reference is their understanding of elements around them from their vantage point and/or knowledge base (Stern, 2005). An author in academia needs to understand their frame of reference, including their assumptions and methodological influences and shortcomings (Stewart, 2003). Researchers choose their own topics. Biases towards these topics exist (Tribe, 2006). Complete objectivity may not be possible. Tribe (2006) agrees with Hall (2004, p. 148) when Hall states, "In terms of why we research what we do, one also cannot ignore the personal."

Conclusion

Tourism is currently an indiscipline, an academic study, and a global network of researchers. The Potentialism discussed in Echtner and Jamal (2007) exists though. Tourism scholars must condense empirical data from multiple disciplines and build theories unique to the phenomenon of tourism. Jovicic's "Tourismology" or Leiper's "Tourology" could be founded.

Kuhn's phases are accepted societally in tourism literature as they are referenced without backlash to their premise (Bird, 2004). Tourism clearly is not a discipline. There is theory construction necessary before future steps toward the building of a discipline can be established.

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