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Research in Tourism - The Search for Research Modes and Methodologies: Advice for young researchers

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Abstract : As Graham Dann once wrote in a review of the book - *Tourism: The State of the Art* - if this is the state of the art, then the art is in a state! That book was based on a conference held in 1994, and since then research into tourism has been characterized by a growing sophistication of methodology and arguably an even greater dispersal into niches of analysis. This paper holds to a view that the perceived lack of a specific paradigm is based upon a monolithic view of what constitutes a paradigm, and that tourism does possess what may be termed both a construct and subject oriented paradigm. It is also suggested that for any applied social science existing in a post-modern world of rapid technological and other changes, there is a growing difficulty in sustaining a meta-narrative. This may be particularly true in some areas of tourism research that may be place and time contextually bound. The paper then considers the pragmatic paradigm and mixed methods as a form of research before finally indicating a series of guidelines for research.

Key words : Research paradigms, mixed methods, pragmatism, research guidelines.

Introduction

Research in tourism covers a multitude of potential areas including the applications of psychology, sociology, economics, environmental science, urban and rural planners and much else, yet many researchers in tourism lack the conventional training that such areas would traditionally command. This reflects the status of tourism as being generally an applied field of social science, but in many senses many of the managerial sciences are actually applications of core social sciences. Is not marketing an application of psychology, sociology and economics? Is not human resource management in business a context for social psychology? So to say that tourism is an applied field of social science is not to demean it. It may be said that management, marketing and human resource management have generated theories that are unique those subject areas, whether it is the 4 or 6 P's of marketing - the advertising stock model, hygiene theory or much else, but tourism has its Irridex, theories of destination life cycles, carrying capacities, recreational and tourism opportunity spectrums, the tourism and the national economy growth hypothesis and theories of place satisfaction - and in one sense all theories of applied social sciences draw on core subjects of social psychology and economics.

Need for a paradigm

There is an angst among some of tourism commentators that tourism as a subject has however no specific paradigm that is wholly its own, while others seek to specify that paradigm within concepts of temporary occupation of place and the journey between destination and point of trip origin. For myself I am relaxed about such discussions and would not wish to impede them because they do add value to what it is that we as researchers are about, but equally the absence of a precise paradigm or theory does not trouble me. I say this for a number of reasons that include:

a) The very concept of a paradigm as some form of meta-narrative seems to me to be rooted in a past debate when there were views of distinct differences between subject areas of academic endeavor;

b) Such views are being overtaken by the growing fluidity of a post-modern world where boundaries disappear and new hybrids of social thinking emerge to be of initially equal status with old certainties born of thinking based on faiths, until in due course one or other of these theories go through their own cycles of birth, maturity and decline. One such example may be the theory of SERVQUAL.

c) The very patterns of travel that were largely initially premised in the 1960s on tourist flows established in Europe that were based on package holidays and mass travel are themselves changing as new markets with different cultures emerge in a world of changing technologies.

The signs of breakdowns between previously established boundaries are around us where-ever we care to look. Many researchers have cited with approval the management and marketing text by Pine and Gilmour, *The Experience Economy* published, perhaps suitably, in 1999 - but that book has at its heart in many examples drawn from the practices of the tourism and hospitality literature. On page 54 the authors wrote of 'guests participating in escapist experiences do not just embark from but also voyage to some specific place and activity' - and while (and here I write with tongue in cheek) this may have been new to the professors of the Harvard Business School, as a body of scholars tourism academics have long been discussing the 'push' and 'pull' dichotomies formulated by Graham Dann and Ios-Ahola way back in the 1970s and 1980s. Hybridity is further evidenced by the journal *Tourism Management*, which is not only the leading tourism research journal as cited by Thomson's Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) Impact Factors, but is equally ranked in the top 30 of the much larger Thomson's listing of Management Journals and the Environmental Science Journals. Old distinctions are breaking down, and while Jafar Jafari (2003) entered a call for a further platform to be added to his original listing - namely that tourism scholars ought to be engaging with a wider circle of academic colleagues rather than simply talking within themselves to both disseminate their findings to inform the thinking of other 'disciplines', my own viewpoint is that debate was already well underway even at the time he called for it to commence. I see this in the way in which those publishing in tourism cite sources from outside the narrow range of tourism journals, and equally when, as an editor, searching for referees using Scopus I see this in the way in which our papers are cited by others who would not normally designate themselves as 'tourism scholars.'

The 'sects' of tourism research and academia

As a subject area we are mature enough to have split into a series of competing 'sects' within a broad church of tourism studies. Our colleagues who primarily write in the field of tourism economics publish widely in econometric and other journals, economists publish in tourism journals - and perhaps neither are understood by those of our colleagues who seek to distinguish themselves by calling themselves the *critical tourism network*, that to quote Dr. Irena Ateljevic's own web page, represents a concept of an *academy of hope*. Those of an empiricist persuasion may view such critical discourses as acts of indulgence (as one critic commented on one of my own papers), while others may feel that earlier academics such as Erik Cohen, Dennison Nash, and Nelson Graburn had trodden similar paths based on anthropological and ethnographic immersion into culture and societies that informed their own much earlier critical studies and which today have come to be regarded as seminal papers. There are other sects, for example, who may see themselves as cultural geographers, environmental scientists, human resource managers or as Information Technology experts, or as providers of services in the hospitality industry. In short, if the maturity of a given subject can be measured by the numerous splinters within it - then we are indeed both mature and hopefully confused. I say hopefully because if we remain confused, then that we will continue to question what it is that we do and study, and equally in our studies, draw upon different modes of examination.

Might I also pass a nod in the direction of the role played by the atheoretical in our debates. Perhaps a notable example is that of Dean MacCannell (1976, p.1), who wrote on the very first page of his introduction to *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* that: "I began work on this project in Paris in 1968 with much disregard for theory". He continues to say that upon listening to Lévi-Strauss "I admit to having been somewhat put off by his remarks, so much so, in fact, that I turned away from French Structuralism at that point, seeking refuge in my small but growing inventory observations of tourists. I would try to understand the place of the tourist in the modern world, I thought, outside of existing theoretical frameworks' (MacCannell, 1976, p.1 -2).

Theory in Tourism Research

He subsequently rediscovered the theoretical underpinnings of his own work and observations in structural anthropology - but my point is not that we necessarily throw out theory - but at the heart of understanding tourism lies observation and immersion in the lives of tourists and residents and the places visited. Even if you are an outright empiricist driven by the use of statistical techniques, there remains a need to stop and stare. Yet as an aside I am jealous of the apparent fact that MacCannell could start his project in 1968, yet his book did not appear until 1976 - a luxury of time that very few of us have today with the pressure to publish. I always knew I was born too late! I missed the University Senior Common Room and the leisurely chats over a glass of port celebrated in the novels of C P Snow!

It is a cliché to state that the only constant is change, but this seems to me to contain at the very least a kernel of truth. We have said that tourism is about experiences and that as researchers we delve into the cognitive and the affective as we seek to understand the nature of tourism, the tourist experience and the tourist destination. We need therefore be aware that such experiences are sensed by sight, touch, taste and smell, and we are moving into an era where it becomes increasingly possible to fool our senses. In some cases that process is open and we can wonder at the paradox - so we can go skiing in Dubai in a shopping mall in the desert, at other times we immerse ourselves knowingly into a false world such as experiencing New Orleans in Disney or spotting one of the 40 replica Eifel Towers in the World (so why bother to go to Paris?), but what if we are unknowingly fooling our senses. The latest Samsung television advertisements promise us a world of a train journey that takes us to the sun, and a shopping mall that is located on the moon.

Given these technological possibilities I become both excited as to the possible directions of our future research and a little impatient with those who criticize us for lacking a specific research paradigm. It seems to me that in many cases the way the concept of a paradigm is used and often misunderstood is redolent of a past world of greater certainty. Hence critics write of a lack of definition as to the core nature of tourism. It is true we have definitions such as those of the UNWTO and the concept of tourists being those travelling away from home and requiring overnight accommodation, but such travelers are deemed not to be working in the visited place. It is equally true that such definitions are challenged by new understandings of mobilities and emergent career structures that take work colleagues to world centres for jobs that may last just a few years and working patterns that challenge the notion of what constitutes 'home'. So, if one is not at home, and not a tourist, what is one? A temporary resident of a place and a global citizen? Paradigms are usually defined as patterns of thought, of consensual agreements of what constitutes the bounds of knowledge and methodology, as means of detecting falsehood. And perhaps tourism fails these definitions of a 'paradigm' because as indicated above, its boundaries are messy and fuzzy, its concerns fluid and its methodologies competing. As Graham Dann once famously said in a book review based on papers of the first Glasgow 'State of the Art Conference in 1990, if this is the state of the art - then the art is in a state!

Paradigms in Research

Our certainties are whittled away to challenge a notion of meta-narratives. Certainly the Kuhnian notion of a paradigm has been questioned as to whether it is applicable to the social sciences, and by extension to tourism. Indeed as early of 1973 John Urry queried the use of Kuhn's concepts as simply espousing an positivist notion of what constituted research, while Kuhn himself referred to sociology as being a pre-paradigmatic state, but as Bryant (1975) pointed out, Kuhn also regarded sociology as multi-paradigmatic. If paradigms are deemed to be exemplars of patterns of thinking, then perhaps, as noted above tourism has but few in number that have emerged but only comparatively recently.

It is important to note that Kuhn's thinking did not simply identify a paradigm as a sign of maturity in a field of academic thought, but he also considered the notions of paradigmatic shifts where existing theories were no longer applicable, where a crisis of model building exists, and new exemplars are sought. Is this so far removed from Foucault's concept of transformational changes in a gaze that provides new ways of seeing the world? Using Masterman's approach of a threefold structure of a paradigm - namely the meta-paradigm or whole ways of seeing, the sociological paradigm, of specific concrete exemplars accepted by a scientific community, or a construct paradigm, which is defined as that which causes puzzle solving, we can claim access to the last two of these classifications. We have our TALC and certainly continue to puzzle about tourists. So it may be possible to conclude that in a post- modern world not only concerned with the consumption of image to bolster our own self-images, and where the popular artists such as Madonna, Lady Gaga and others continually reinvent themselves by regeneration of image, but a world also of rapidly changing technologies and (as I look at divorce rates and labour turnover statistics) of rapidly changing social relationships - then I begin to question whether in in arena of the study of social phenomena such as tourism it is possible to possess a meta-narrative.

We are therefore faced with a splintered tourism paradigm - a study of people's movements, drawn toward attractions that are increasingly signed and sacralised in MacCannell's terminology, increasingly managed and where there may no longer be a back stage as the image takes the foreground. The tourism paradigm is splintered by it being a juxtaposition of business, sociology, psychology, urban and rural planning and environmental sciences as I indicated above. Within these 'sects' though there are constructs that as researchers we recognize and draw upon - and our sects call upon past patterns of research to confirm, modify, deny, adapt as the case may be.

If the world is hence a world of flux, where does that leave our modes of conducting research? Are empiricists with their statistical tests left only to analyse sets of thoughts that are bounded by a context of time and place with little certainty of generalization of results to other locations? What happens to the concept of parsimonious theory identifying key variables whereby the noise of reality is reduced to minimal residual effects?

The answer that has emerged is that of a paradigm of research pragmatism. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) have generated a long list of the general characteristics of pragmatism, of which a few are (a) it occupies a middle ground between dogmatism and skepticism, (b) theories are viewed instrumentally, (c) endorses eclecticism and pluralism, (d) views current truth, meaning and knowledge as tentative and changing over time and (e) views knowledge as being both constructed and based on the reality of the world we experience and live in. These are but 5 of the 22 characteristics that they identify.

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) therefore advocate mixed methods research, which is defined as 'the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study (p.17). Philosophically it combines the inductive, deductive and abductive - that is it seeks patterns in data, tests theories and relies on the best sets of explanations to understand those results. They distinguish between a *mixed-model* and a *mixed method* and these are illustrated in Figure 1.

		Concurrent	Sequential
Paradigm Emphasis Decision	Equal Status	QUAL + QUAN	QUAL → QUAN QUAN → QUAL
	Dominant Status	QUAL + quan QUAN + qual	QUAL → quan qual → QUAN QUAN → qual quan → QUAL

It should be noted that in Figure 1 the research can add further stages - for example Qual → QUAN → Qual. Equally lower case letters in the diagram represent a subordinate role and upper case a major role.

Mixed-methods has increasingly come to be recognized as a legitimate research paradigm, yet I do wonder if often we have confused the *methodology* with the epistemology - but then the debate on the qualitative versus the quantitative research methods oft appears to make the same assumptions. For example it is forgotten that both the qualitative and the quantitative researcher may adopt a post-positivistic stance - while it may also be argued that the quantitative research is never wholly value free as it is the researcher who determines which statistical test is appropriate - a matter that may just as much decided by experience and expertise as mathematical rigour.

Mixed-methods are hence based arguably on a paradigm of pragmatism, yet pragmatism is not without potential weaknesses. It has been argued that pragmatism tends to the incremental rather than the radical (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Additionally it seems to me that effectively the use of mixed methods implicitly belongs to the post-positivistic rather than the constructionist, critical or transformative paradigm camps. Almost intuitively the combination of the quantitative with the qualitative appears to me to indicate that some social truth is being held to exist outside of the researcher. This may be a perceptual or consensual truth, but the attempt to quantify it implies a consistency of existence separate from the researcher. At one level this can be equated with the post-positivistic paradigm - but it might be argued that if a researcher seeks to be transformative, there is perhaps a need to identify what is to be transformed.

Guidelines for the post graduate researcher.

If it is accepted that there exist qualitative differences between research conducted at the Master's degree level and that at a doctoral level, then one such difference may lay in the former being concerned with the acquisition of technical skills and the latter with the application of those skills in a context of an understanding of a specific research project. This does imply that there is a duty imposed on students and their supervisors to be aware of and able to use contemporary research techniques and methodologies. Thus to my mind the qualitative researcher who does not use textual analysis software is omitting a key means of analysis, while the quantitative research who does not incorporate at least some open-ended items in a questionnaire for analysis likewise may be missing an opportunity.

I appreciate that given the emergent means of analysis it is not possible to be fully competent in the wide array of techniques that exist today; but if as researchers and supervisors we are still using the same techniques today as we did a decade or more ago, then we could be questioned as to why this is the case. Therefore for post graduate students perhaps the first thing is to look at the publications of your possible supervisors to see what it is that they write and what modes of analysis they use.

The second thing is to acquire an expertise and knowledge in some good sound methodologies - and therefore your reading must not only look at the concepts that exist in your chosen research field, but also look at the methods being used and read about those methods too, and their use in areas outside of tourism.

Third, you must know why you select those methods, and that questioning takes you into consideration of the research paradigms outlined above. To state the obvious, a doctoral qualification is, in its nomenclature, a philosophy degree, and thus in an oral defense it is pertinent to be asked about why a specific approach was not taken, and why was it considered superior to other approaches. In short, know the philosophy associated with given research methods.

Fourth, I believe it is important that you are transparent in your research methods. Certainly as an editor I ask to see the questionnaires that have been used in the research, and we publish them in the interests of developing comparative research. But equally a referee can look at the questionnaire and if, for example, finds that an exploratory factor analysis does not use all the items in the questionnaire - it is legitimate to ask what happened to the missing items. Again, as an editor I also ask for the descriptive statistics associated with the items. Why? Many statistical techniques require or assume a normality of distribution, and I do wonder why so many journals publish articles using SEM where that information is not made known to the referee or reader. SEM is a technique easily manipulated to achieve a required goodness of fit statistics, and readers ought to know if items have been dropped. In fact, from my perspective the more interesting question is, if the theory seemed so good, why was it not supported by the data?

Fifth, when you come to publish a paper, do appreciate that today most subscribers to the journal take only the internet version of the journal, and the internet can do more than simply replicate a page of text. So do add visual evidence. You no longer have to pay for colour publishing, and equally you can add short video clips of a minute or so without overly stressing the download capabilities of many readers. These techniques add a new dynamic to our work as researchers, and give a new meaning to the term of 'mixed methods'.

Six, do remember that the internet also delivers new means of acquiring data and at the very least you should be familiar with major search engines offered by the publishers as well as simply Google - and with reference to Google, many universities now link their portfolio of journals with publishers databases under Google Scholar. But equally be aware of seminal papers in the literature - just search for papers from a certain period may mean you miss earlier ground breaking papers. Know how to search for h indices and similar indices, use them also to assess potential supervisors, and to assess the impacts of individual articles, but do not loose sight of commonsense. Additionally remember that these bibliometrics that help you also record you when you get published, so if you aim for an academic career, then your doctoral research is simply a start and not the completion of your research career.

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