



Enlightening Tourism.

A Pathmaking Journal



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BOOKS REVIEW:

Some Current Books on Tourism Research

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What constitutes tourism research in terms of strategies and methodologies? Is there anything special about it in the sense that its methods and strategies emerge in a particular way from the questions that it asks, or is it more a case of applying tried and tested techniques that have developed generically over the years in the social sciences and the very professionalised field of market research? Is there a corpus of literature on tourism research methods that is distinctive and consonant with the study of tourism? These questions lie at the heart of many current debates about the state and status of tourism as an area of academic enquiry. In the same way that tourism theory might be seen to have originated outside the field, with sources in sociology, anthropology and cultural studies, and more operationally in economics and business studies, these spheres have brought with them their own methods of enquiry replete with authoritative texts, insights and prejudices. Perhaps it is simply because tourism has never achieved full disciplinary status that its methods have remained external to it, and it may be that this will remain the case whilst it continues to operate as a field of study without the kind of self-referential conceptual development that would raise its status (Tribe 1997).

One of the effects of this status (and stasis) is that the subject has become dominated by a relatively narrow methodological repertoire much of which is drawn from the social sciences and from its more commercial manifestations in market research. The latter has endowed it with a distinctly conservative ethos that focuses on largely quantitative techniques which, to be fair to their users, have achieved some sophistication. A turn to more qualitative techniques in the social sciences and therefore in tourism (Riley and Love 2000) and to more adventurous approaches to these under the aegis of recent non-representational theories (Thrift 2008) has created a sharper division between those who espouse the traditional quantitative survey and those who have long since abandoned what they see as redundant methodologies (Savage and Burrows 2007).

So where does this leave us now, and how does current thinking in tourism research manifest these debates? Well this is a bigger question than can be encompassed in a small review piece, but it is a question that others should feel free to explore. To get us started, however, I thought it might be worthwhile looking at some current texts of the sort that might be used by students, academic researchers and practitioners, to see how they have addressed some of these issues. I have selected three texts that seem to offer valuable contributions and here is my brief look at each of them.

Cultural Tourism Research Methods, edited by G. Richards and W. Munsters, 2010, CABI / ISBN 9781845935184.

This is an excellent place to start our explorations. It begins with an insightful comparison of quantitative and qualitative analyses, drawing out the strengths and weaknesses of each and discussing their relevance to cultural tourism. The great strength of this book is that it does not paint itself into a particular corner and seeks, rather, to identify the strategic significance not only of quantitative and qualitative research, but also the benefits of mixed methods and how the quantitative and qualitative camps can be mixed and merged in order to address research questions. It also draws strength from the multi (or is it inter-) disciplinary nature of tourism in

order to locate the field within a very contemporary theoretical framework. There are some great contributions here, with standout chapters that really push back the methodological boundaries and which provide evidence for the view that our field really has reached the level where it can foster its own methods of inquiry. Whilst it is invidious to name particular contributions in such a strong collection it would be remiss of me not to mention the chapters by Gregory Willson and Alison MacIntosh, and Ana M. González Fernández, María Carmen Rodríguez Santos and Miguel Cervantes Blanco, for their novelty and originality. The chapters by the editors themselves also have great merit in drawing this wide and fascinating collection together.

Tourism Research Methods: Integrating Theory with Practice, edited by B. W. Ritchie, and P. M. Burns, and C. A. Palmer, 2005 / CABI/ ISBN 9780851999968.

This is another book that demonstrates the possibilities for research strategies that are born within tourism rather than drawn from outside. Although by no means new, and certainly due for a second edition its strength is in combining in a very convincing way some abstruse theory with some important practicalities. For example the chapter by Cara Aitchison on gender perspectives is a perfect reflective counterfoil to Weaver and Lawton's exploration of cluster analysis in the segmentation of Australian ecotourists. The standout chapter in this book, however, has to be the essay by Carla Santos on Framing Analysis. This piece echoes and elaborates, from a methodological point of view, her brilliant 2004 article in the *Annals of Tourism Research*, 'Framing Portugal: Representational Dynamics', which was a tour de force analysis of media representations of tourist destinations and the ideological corollaries of such representations. C. Michael Hall's concluding and summarising chapter explores the future of tourism research from within the field, another valuable contribution, and let us hope for an update soon.

Right up-to-date now with a Handbook of Research Methods in Tourism: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches, edited by Larry Dwyer, Alison Gill and Neelu Seetaram, 2012, Edward Elgar Publishing, ISBN 978 1 78100 128 8.

This is more a book for the university library than the scholar's study, but it is worth more than a cursory glance for its very contemporary look at the quantitative-qualitative debate and how these traditionally competing camps can finally be reconciled. Perhaps there is not too much here to surprise us in terms of theoretical depth, but there is certainly a breadth to this that makes it an essential reference book for anyone embarking on a tourism research project, either as a scholar or a practitioner. The sheer range of topics on offer is as absorbing as it is impressive. I have to admit that the section on quantitative methods left me reeling and I felt more at home with the excellent and encyclopaedic qualitative section, but it really is all here and a must consult, if not must read for every serious researcher. The chapter on community case study approaches by Dianne Dredge and Rob Hales was particularly insightful and innovative.

So, tourism research is alive and well and perhaps it really is developing its own canon from within the field – or dare I say discipline. Only time will tell if we can reach a level of methodological maturity that will meet the demands of active and expanding theory, and I think there is some way to go yet. These three books give us some hope, but let us know what you think. Tell us what research issues you think are important and use his journal to review the key texts that you think can move the debate forward.

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P.S.: If you would like to review a new or recent book, or you have a suggestion for a book to be reviewed in the journal, please contact Steve Watson, Book Reviews Editor, at s.watson@yorks.ac.uk