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The Evolution of Research Methods in Tourism: Personal Reflections

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Paper read at the International Seminar on the Evolution of Research Methods, Department of Architecture & Planning, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2 May 2016.

Talk outline

- Introduction: locating Tourism
- Main research trends
- Doing applied research
- Concluding thoughts

Introduction: locating Tourism

- Where is Tourism located?
- Broad Social Sciences?
- Business & Management?
- Geography? Sociology or Social Anthropology?
- Cultural & Heritage?
- Link to location of tourism academics – trend to location in business schools

Locating Tourism

- Tourism: relatively 'new' discipline compared with Economics, Geography or even Business & Management!
- Location of tourism academic staff significant
- Impact on teaching (& pedagogy); workload & student cohort
- Impact on research; overall approach to research; 'approved' methods; access to funding; where to publish results (journals, books, conferences, practitioner reports etc)
- Departmental 'culture' as well

- Early research in 1930s (domestic tourism in USA, UK, land use, recreation)
- By 1960s tourism for economic development (official government reports, 1967 as International Year of Tourism)
- World Bank & other loans for integrated resort development (Nusa Dua; Cancun, Mexico)

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- By 1970s academic studies on international tourism
- **Geographers** (Theo Hills) – Caribbean – early studies of tourism on islands with fieldwork
- **Economists** (Brian Archer): work on economic impacts & the tourism multiplier
- **Sociologists** (Eric Cohen): social & cultural effects of independent travellers, Southern Thai Islands etc.

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Main research trends

- 1980s high level theories: radical (dependency theory: Britton); systems (Mill & Morrison, Leiper)
- Since late 1990s rise of managerial/business perspectives

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- Decline in geographical approaches (e.g. lack of major work on coastal morphology/tourism planning/spatial aspects)
- Unlike Hussey (1989) . . .
- In key tourism journals two clear trends: post-modernism & positivism
- **BUT** – arguably both are of little interest/use to policy-makers!

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Doing applied research

- My narrative: background in International Development
- Discipline? Probably Development Geographer
- Publish in tourism journals (Annals of Tourism Research; Tourism Geographies; Current Issues in Tourism)
- But also in development & geography journals (World Development; Third World Quarterly; Environment & Planning)

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- My research approach is within broad political economy (underlying question; who wins, who loses from tourism?)
- Aim: to understand tourism for economic development & how tourism can lift communities out of poverty
- Is applied research & aims to be policy-relevant
- New emphasis in UK academia & funding on real world & policy 'impact' → fieldwork is a key component

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- Experience: South-East Asia, Caribbean, South Atlantic & Indian Ocean
- **Ethnographic**, qualitative approach → favoured technique semi-structured, in-depth interviews
- Using insights from rapid (rural) appraisal
- 'fast & dirty' limited fieldwork (budget, time) so concentrated period & analyse afterwards

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Ethnography

- Using ethnographic approach - aim to understand & gain rich, nuanced data & insights into people's actions & views in their local context
- Rich history in 20th Century with anthropologists e.g. Malinowski (Pacific) & Margaret Mead (Samoa & Bali)
- Is extremely useful for analysing socio-economic impacts of tourism

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Research Project Case 1: Rural (island) fieldwork

- Funding in late 1990s for a pilot study in Lombok
- Gili Trawangan island: 'rest place' for backpackers after hard travelling
- Overall research question: backpackers of overall economic benefit for host community in developing countries?

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Island fieldwork

- During fieldwork only backpacker accommodation, beach cafes & dive shops (now more upmarket & boutique hotels)
- No existing data (not disaggregated, under reporting) → had to collect baseline data myself
- **Methodology:** mix of semi-structured interviews (backpackers & service providers); questionnaires; site mapping & participant observation

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- Fieldwork periods: March & August
- Each visit 'fast & dirty' for 2 weeks: rapid rural appraisal
- Comparative advantage: previous knowledge of island, visited previous year
- Semi-structured interviews (n=25) & questionnaires with tourists, café & accommodation owners

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Site mapping

- No useful maps available: need to create own
- Initial rough sketch of beach areas in notebook + added comments
- Created outline simple map of island
- [Before Google Earth & Google Images]
- [Now: also software to help create own maps of research site]

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- Main findings: key contribution to local economy - backpackers spend was surprisingly high (US \$65-100 week on food & accommodation)
- BUT some questions of increasing role/power of outsiders (Hampton, 1998)
- And growing environmental issues (Hampton & Hampton, 2009)

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Gili Trawangan revisited: 2011

- British Academy/University of Kent funding to revisit island
- Longitudinal study: more than 16 years since last visit
- 2 researchers MH + Research Assistant, 2 weeks on island
- Interviews (n=21): digitally recorded, analysed with NVivo.
- Mapped same beach
- Paper on longitudinal study published (Hampton & Jeyacheya, 2015)

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- Found some original contacts from 1990s' visits!
- Livelihood analysis: massive change
- Original hut
- New hotels. . . From beach shack to shops

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Case 2: Multi-site fieldwork

- \$80,000 18-month project funded by Ministry of Tourism Malaysia
- Fieldwork summer 2006 in Malaysia + brief visits to Thailand (Khao San Rd) & Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh City)
- Overall research question: economic impact of backpackers & how to maximise?

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- Complex fieldwork: 6 main research sites in Malaysia + 2 cities in other countries!
- Plus further small case studies
- International team: project leader, MH & 2 other academics +2 Research Assistants

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- Again, mix of techniques: semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, site mapping & digital pictures
- New technique: self-mapping. Respondents draw their route across Asia on outline map
- Maps then analysed to create flows & circuits
- Flows & geographies (Hampton & Hamzah, 2016)

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Concluding thoughts

- Research methods in tourism have evolved as discipline has grown
- Early pioneers from Geography, Economics, Sociology etc.
- Increasing influence of Business & Management (marketing, 'big data', increasing quants etc)
- [Arguably as academia mirrors the global dominance of neo-liberalism]
- In major tourism journals: twin trends of post-modernism & positivist methods – BUT policy-relevance?

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Concluding thoughts

- Problem for applied research especially ethnographic or spatial...
- Also impact of journal rankings/listings, performance/citation metrics & other 'rationing' of funding by government & agencies
- Many universities' growing 'bureaucratic burden' e.g. increasing influence of Ethics Committees & risk adverse institutions. If work with human subjects becomes politically controlled, migration to less controversial data/quants studies?
- **BUT** risk losing academia's ability to ask difficult questions.....

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