2011 International Conference on Environmental Science and Engineering (ICESE 2011)

Why People Travel to Different Regions: a New Tourism Research Framework from Geographical Perspective

Shien Zhong, Jie Zhang

School of Geographic and Oceanographic Sciences Nanjing University Nanjing, China
fgh1475@163.com, jiezhang@nju.edu.cn

Abstract

This paper proposes a new geographical framework to understand tourism phenomenon based on a traditional framework. Three basic spatial patterns between tourist flows and functional tourism regions (FTR), i.e. concentric zone pattern, centre-periphery pattern and spatial diffusion pattern. A hierarchical structure is incorporated, i.e. single point dimension, point to point dimension and the systematic dimension.

© 2011 Published by Elsevier B.V. Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of National University of Singapore. Open access under CC BY-NC-ND license.

Keywords: Functional tourism region; Tourist flow; Concentric zone pattern; Centre-periphery pattern; Spatial diffusion pattern.

1. Introduction

Why people travel to different destinations have always been a key question of understanding the tourism phenomenon (Papatheodorou 2001; Zhong, etc. 2010). Tourist origins, tourist flows and tourist destinations are the three key research domains. The former researched from demand perspectives while the latter mostly focus on supply perspectives. Tourist flows accordingly are studied from linkage perspective.

Various geographical phenomena interweave and concentrate intra-regionally and inter-regionally (Fan 2004). But region as a concept applied to tourism spaces is somehow ambiguous and imprecise (Baidal 2004). With the above in mind, we argue that regions provide living space for tourist flows characterized by actions of social groups. Definitions of tourist origin and tourist destination hence require a new regional perspective. As mentioned above, conventional definitions of tourist origins and tourist...
destinations can be misleading, while a new regional perspective may help identify the tourism function of different regions systematically. In most cases, regions integrate twofold functions — emitting tourist flow and attracting tourist flow. Intra-regional and inter-regional tourist flows interweave comprehensively in a regional tourist flow system. Many scholars have considered this phenomenon and noted complicated interactions between regions (e.g. Lundgren 1982; Pearce 1981, 1987a). Admittedly, differentiation emerges where some regions’ emitting ability outweighs their attracting ability and vice versa.

Present literatures are full of confusion for government departments, destination administrations, tourism operators and new researchers. So a new concept ‘functional tourism region’ is coined. Then, a new geographical and systematic research framework is proposed.

2. A Proposed Geographical Framework

2.1 Traditional geographical framework

Traditional research focus on three key tourism concepts: tourist origins, tourist flows and tourist destinations (Leiper 1979). Tourist origins can be classified from different dimensions: City areas-Rural areas, Centre-Periphery, Developed countries-Developing countries, etc.. Tourist destinations can be classified to six main categories: urban destinations, seaside destinations, rural destinations, Alpine destinations, authentic third world, unique-exotic-exclusive destinations (Buhalis 2000). So in this case, different spatial relationships form between tourist origins, tourist flows and tourist destinations. At least there are six main types: (1) from developed countries to less-developed countries (e.g. Pearce 1987a); (2) from high latitudes to low latitudes (e.g. Hill and Lundgren 1977; Hoivik and Heiberg 1980; Williams and Zelinsky 1970); (3) from core areas to peripheral areas (e.g. Britton 1980; Hoivik and Heiberg 1980); (4) from metropolises to small cities, rural areas or tourism enclaves (e.g. Britton 1980; Lundgren 1982; Wolfe 1951; Wu and Cai 2006); (5) from populous areas to climatically comfortable areas (e.g. Christaller 1964; Hoivik and Heiberg 1980; Jansen-Verbeke 1995; Limtanakool 2007; Pearce 1987a, 1987b; Smith 1981); (6) from rural areas to cities was also noted (e.g. Pearce 1996; Seaton and Palmer 1997).

Accordingly, the traditional research framework can be classified to four dimensions, i.e. tourist dimensions, destination dimensions, interactional dimension between tourists and destinations and barrier dimension, which all can be incorporated into Table 1.

2.2 New geographical framework

So in this paper, we propose a new concept called an ‘Functional Tourism Region’ (FTR). In a regional tourist flow system, an FTR refers to a tourism region attracting inter-regional tourist flows depending on its tourism resources functioning as a role of tourist destination, while emitting inter-regional tourist flows functioning as a role of tourist origin. An FTR can be a country, a state, a province or a city according to administrative boundaries. Jansen-Verbeke (1995) even once defined a tourism region or a geographical area from economic or cultural aggregation levels.From an FTR perspective, the traditional tourist origins and tourist destinations are special cases of FTRs, as they are FTRs functioning solely as a tourist origin or solely as a tourist destination. Accordingly, measurement of directional bias should shift from the traditional unilateral relationship to the actual bilateral relationship which usually remains asymmetrical.
Table 1 The traditional geographical tourism framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics Decomposition</th>
<th>Measured Value or Approaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tourist dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic characteristics</td>
<td>Gender, Marital status, Age, Education, Health status, Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tripogetic characteristics</td>
<td>Purpose(or motivation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer preference</td>
<td>Marginal rate of substitution, in-depth interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Destination dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product characteristics</td>
<td>Quality, Price, Monopoly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agglomeration or Complement</td>
<td>Diversification index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative or Substitution</td>
<td>Characteristics of other(or new) destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactional Dimension between Tourist and Destination</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination image or perception</td>
<td>First time or repeat, in-depth interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium(i.e. advertising,internet,magazine, newspaper)</td>
<td>Medium type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barrier Dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available time</td>
<td>Disposable time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available expenditure</td>
<td>Disposable expenditure (or income)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>Distance, or in-depth interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With new coined concept of FTR, this article paints a sketch map from two dimensional scale to visualize the basic spatial patterns of the relationships between tourist flows and FTRs. One dimensional scale covers a hierarchical ordering which are “single point dimension, point to point dimension, systematic dimension”. The other dimensional scale spans a spectrum, from the left to the right are the three basic spatial patterns of the relationships between tourist flows and FTRs, i.e. concentric zone pattern, centre-periphery pattern, spatial diffusion pattern. Concentric zone pattern stresses on the regular, centripetal and hierarchical structure from the inner zone to the outlying zone, see A, B, C and D in Figure 1. A and B symbolize single point dimension, C for point to point dimension while C symbolizes systematic dimension. Centre-periphery pattern reflects the relationship between the core areas and the peripheral areas from dependence perspective. E reflects the tourism phenomenon that tourist flows move from centre to periphery, while F reflects the mutual movements between centre-centre, centre-periphery, periphery to periphery. Spatial diffusion pattern researches the spatial pattern, flowing process of tourist flow from dynamic angle. G in Figure 1 visualizes the directional bias of tourist from FTR mainly as tourist origins to FTR mainly as tourist destinations. H incorporates two categories of TTR mainly as tourist destinations, the declined FTR and the new FTR.

3. Conclusions

This article proposes a new geographical framework to understand tourism phenomenon based on traditional framework. Two points need to address for Figure 1. First, the horizontal axis incorporate three basic spatial patterns between tourist flows and FTRs, i.e. concentric zone pattern, centre-periphery pattern and spatial diffusion pattern. The three patterns have no distinct borderlines between good or bad. Different study cases can present different patterns. The vertical axis symbolizes a hierarchical structure. Compared to the single point dimension and point to point dimension, the systematic dimension seems that it can give us more detailed understanding about the components and the interweaving interaction between tourist flows and FTRs.
Acknowledgment

This study was supported by a grant from National Natural Science Foundation of China (to Jie Zhang, No. 40371030)

References

Concentric zone pattern  Centre-periphery pattern  Spatial diffusion pattern

- Region
- Functional tourism regions (Mainly as tourist origins)
- Functional tourism regions (Mainly as tourist destinations)
- Declined destinations
- Hinterlands (Inflows or Outflows)
- Tourist flows
- Directional bias

Figure 1 A proposed geographical framework (Cited from Zhong et al. 2010)