

Tourism Research: A 20-20 Vision



Edited by

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**Tourism and development: looking back
and looking ahead – more of the same?**

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4 **Tourism and development: looking back and looking ahead – more of the same?**

David Harrison

Introduction

Since the Second World War, mass international tourism has become immensely significant to the world economy and is now established globally as a tool for development, making a major contribution to the world economy, especially to developing countries, even though they take but a small proportion of the world's tourists, and most particularly small states and island societies (UNWTO, 2008: 1). As a consequence, mass international tourism has increasingly attracted the attention not only of governments and a plethora of aid agencies and national and other international institutions, but also of scholars of 'development'. Indeed, while social change and 'progress' have been the major concern of social science since the Enlightenment, 'development' as a separate concept, along with 'development studies' as a self-conscious sub-discipline, emerged only after 1945, and it was thus inevitable that, from the beginnings of mass international tourism, it would be linked with development, and would reflect the changing priorities of development studies.

From the 1960s until the 1980s, the trajectory of tourism in developing countries was largely conceptualised through the competing lenses of pro-capitalist Modernisation (bourgeois) Theory (MT) or anti-capitalist Underdevelopment (UDT) (Neo-Marxist, Dependency or World Systems) Theory (Telfer, 2002). In so far as these represented different 'paradigms', they tended to focus, respectively, on the advantages and disadvantages of tourism as a form of development, as purportedly seen from the perspective of the developing countries.

However, by the 1980s (especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall) the positions occupied by adherents of these competing perspectives were no longer considered theoretically adequate, empirically justified or politically appropriate in a world where old ideologies were being subjected to new questioning and found wanting. Globalisation theory emerged, denoting a process where 'constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding' (Waters, 1995: 3). Although divisions between

those favouring state intervention (statists) and others wishing to give a free rein to the market (neo-liberals) continued, globalisation theory incorporated the internal economic and socio-cultural factors prioritised by MT and the external and systemic linkages of UDT, *along with* the increasingly pressing concerns of environmentalism.

Inevitably, such changes in theoretical perspectives were reflected in approaches to tourism, development, and over the last decade tourism scholars have started to focus on tourism's role in the interplay of local destinations with global processes (Sofield, 2001; Wahab and Cooper, 2001; Munar, 2007; Sharpley, 2009). And with the decline of the old ideologies and 'grand theories' of tourism's role in development came a more pragmatic, empirical focus on what was happening 'on the ground'. It was less important to know who (and of what persuasion) said what, than to know if there was empirical evidence for their assertions.

In the context of this new and more empirically-orientated environment, the focus of this chapter is, first, the current state of tourism development studies, its descriptive and prescriptive elements, and the role of international organisations. It then moves to the need for further empirical research on the role of the state, and the ways different economic institutions, including TNCs and SMEs, and different kinds of tourism, including domestic tourism, influence tourism development. Finally, a brief agenda for the future is suggested, focusing on: the theoretical understanding of tourism's role in the context of climate change; closer relationships with, and understanding of, other stakeholders involved in using tourism as a development tool; comparative studies of tourism development in developing societies *and* developed societies and, finally, the impacts of different *kinds* of tourism in reducing poverty and bringing about 'development'.

The current state of tourism development studies

The less ideological approach just described enables and entails a greater element of cross-disciplinary co-operation. Geography, sociology, anthropology, political science, history and social psychology, for example, can all legitimately add the suffix 'of tourism development', as can a raft of physical sciences, which together contribute to our understanding of the tourism 'system'. Such a notion, which is neither new nor subject to consensus (Hall, 2008: 76-80), is a conceptual construct that recognises tourism occurs in a highly complex global, biophysical, social, cultural and economic environment. As conceived here (Figure 4.1), the tourist 'system' is similar to the 'Comprehensive Tourism System' of Farrell and Twining-Ward (2003: 279), which 'includes significant social, economic, geological and ecological components'. The system's processes, viewable from a variety of perspectives, are geared to the movement of tourists to and from generating societies in a shifting international context, continuously linking the changing cultures and

Chapter extract

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