

Tourism Research: A 20-20 Vision

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Introduction: looking back, moving forward

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1 Introduction: looking back, moving forward

Douglas G. Pearce

Tourism research continues to expand at a rapid rate as testified by the ever-growing number of journals, books and conferences in this field. Whether there has been a commensurate increase in our understanding of tourism, however, is another matter, for this explosion in output has meant it is increasingly difficult to keep pace with what is being produced. Tourism research remains of mixed quality, studies are often fragmented, lack a clear sense of direction and are often not underpinned by a sound theoretical basis. As a result, progress has been variable, opportunities have been missed and the platform for future research on tourism is perhaps not as solid as it might be.

These issues were addressed by fellows of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism at their biennial meeting held in Mallorca in June 2009. The Academy was established in Santander, Spain in 1988 and held its first biennial meeting the following year in Warsaw and Zakopane, Poland (Dann, 2009). Founded at the initiative of Jafar Jafari, the Academy is an international, limited membership, multidisciplinary body whose goals are 'to further the scholarly research and professional investigation of tourism, to encourage the application of the findings, and to advance the international diffusion and exchange of tourism knowledge'. In celebrating the 20th anniversary of the meeting in Poland it was deemed appropriate to focus on what progress had been made in tourism research over the previous two decades and to consider where research in this field might go in the future, hence the theme of the meeting and the title of this volume which contains a selection of the revised papers presented in Mallorca. The evolution of tourism research over this period, including that presented at meetings of the Academy, can be contextualized in terms of developments in tourism and broader changes in society at large.

Development

Over the last two decades the volume of international tourist arrivals worldwide has more than doubled (Table 1.1). While the current global economic recession has clearly dented projections in the near term – UNWTO (2009) figures show international arrivals were down 7 per cent in the first eight months of 2009 – tourism in the past has proved resilient and continued growth seems assured once economies

recover. Table 1.1 also illustrates some significant redistribution in the global pattern of arrivals over the last 20 years, notably the emergence of the Asia Pacific region, a trend which seems set to continue. Moreover, in many places domestic demand is greater than international and the Asia Pacific region in particular, especially China, has also experienced a significant increase in domestic tourism.

Table 1.1: Evolution of international arrivals (millions) by world region: 1989-2030. Sources: 1989-2020 UNWTO (2006a, b), 2030 Yeoman (2008)

	Europe	Americas	Asia/Pacific	Africa	Middle East	World
1989	250.7	86.9	49.4	13.9	9.2	410.1
	61%	21%	12%	3%	2%	100%
1999	370.5	121.9	98.7	27	21.5	639.6
	58%	19%	15%	4%	3%	100%
2008	487.9	147.2	184.1	47	55.6	922
	53%	16%	20%	5%	6%	100%
2020	717	282	416	77	69	1561
	46%	18%	27%	5%	4%	100%
2030	799.9	309.8	546.5	101.8	158.9	1897
	42%	16%	29%	5%	8%	100%

Much of the growth in tourism research might therefore be attributed quite simply to the fact that there has been more tourism to study in new and different places. It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that research on the development of tourism has been a recurrent theme in meetings of the Academy. Increasing interest and concern with the way tourism was developing in the 1980s resulted in a focus on 'alternative tourism' at the Academy's 1989 meeting (Smith and Eadington, 1992). That concept was subject to much scrutiny and debate, with the resultant book's title, *Tourism Alternatives*, reflecting the view that those present saw little merit in a single way forward. Environmental and community issues associated with tourism development were addressed at the Cairo meeting in 1995 (Cooper and Wanhill, 1997), with a range of associated issues and approaches also being explored at the following meeting in Melaka, Malaysia (Pearce and Butler, 1999). A characteristic of several of the papers at the latter meeting was that they dealt with parts of the world where tourism was just developing (Ghana, Samoa, Vietnam and India's Bhyundar Valley) and with other regions such as Patagonia that have a longer tradition of tourism but where there had previously been little material available in English. Other papers considered the factors underlying growth, both in terms of supply and demand, and showed how tourism development was being linked to other processes such as heritage conservation or the spread of casino gambling. Many of the papers presented in Beijing in 2005 considered implications for destination management, planning for tourism development and human capital issues (Gartner and Hsu, in press). Wang and Wall (in press), for example, compared planning models used in

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