

A Tourism Study group for the DSA

International Tourism in 2015

International tourism is a undoubtedly major force in the 'development' of the global economy. The UNWTO has estimated that In 2013 there were an estimated 1.087 billion international tourist trips (UNWTO *Highlights, 2014*). and the impetus behind the tourism 'industry' (more properly a series of industries) shows no sign of abating. Reportedly accounting for 9% of global GDP, 1.1 million jobs, and \$1.4 trillion (6%) of the world's exports, international tourism is big business. Furthermore, *domestic* tourists play a vital role in national economies, globally accounting for at least four times as many travellers as international tourism.

Tourism is vital to the economies in both the 'developing' and 'developed' world (in so far as this distinction remains valid). Of those thirty countries in the world most dependent on tourism, twenty-three are islands, where tourists, though a small percentage of global visitors, are crucial to economic survival. By contrast, tourism in the UK reportedly accounts for 9% of GDP, and the UK is the eighth largest international tourism destination, as measured in both numbers of arrivals and tourist expenditure (Tourism Alliance, 2015: 2).

Academic Approaches to Tourism as a 'tool' for Development

Academics have studied tourism and its impacts since 1970s, often with reservations about how far it contributes or hinders economic, social and cultural aspects of 'development.' MacCannell (1976) and Smith (1978) were among the first anthropologists to address tourism as a major issue in modern society, while answers to the many questions raised by de Kadt (1979) as to tourism's role in development have remained largely controversial. Since then, debate has continued, within the field of 'tourism studies' and within traditional academic disciplines, as well as within and across such 'paradigms,' (if such they are), as modernisation, underdevelopment theory, neo-liberalism, sustainability and, most recently, mobilities (Sharpley and Telfer, 2015; Harrison, 2014).

Within the UK, studies in tourism have occurred in two quite distinct contexts. First in the 'new' universities, primarily those that were formerly polytechnics, it has traditionally been linked with marketing, policy formulation and management, often in business schools. By contrast, the 'old' universities have tended to approach tourism, if at all, from a more 'academic' perspective, e.g. the anthropology or geography of tourism, tourism and the environment, etc.. These distinctions are gradually breaking down but differences remain, and all too frequently scholars in one set of institutions (and their students) are unaware of what is happening in others.

Elsewhere, divisions may be less marked. In Australasia and Southeast Asia, for example, studies of tourism may be situated in schools and universities with a heavy emphasis on hospitality and on training, as opposed to education, for work in international hotels and other sections of the numerous occupations that make up the tourist 'industry.'

Nevertheless, despite these differences, there is widespread agreement on the key controversies that accompany the growth of tourism, especially *mass* tourism. These include the extent it involves 'commoditisation' and a loss of 'authenticity,' cultural and ethnic distinctiveness, whether or not tourism, in any form, can – with proper planning and management - be sustainable, and how far the state can or should intervene to control tourism development by private capital. At heart, too, is an apparent balance sheet of tourism's positive and negative impacts and – in both 'developing' and 'developed' countries, the debate as to whether or not tourism contributes to 'development.'

The Tourism Academic Community

In the UK, academics studying and researching tourism are widely diffused. An approximate indication of their extent can be obtained from an internet search (<http://www.postgraduatesearch.com>; accessed 21st June 2015), which revealed that 52 UK universities are currently offering a total of 131 postgraduate courses in tourism. All but 10 of these might be described as 'new' universities, and most focus on the 'business' side of tourism, for example, management and planning. However, 10 older universities also offer tourism at postgraduate level,

tending to do so as part of a wider remit, for example, conservation, the environment, anthropology or cultural studies.

As well as universities offering postgraduate courses specifically on tourism, it is significant in other programmes, for example, those dealing with area studies (especially East and Southeast Asia, as well as Europe), and where students of single disciplines, for example, social anthropology and political science, are examining the structure and operation of modern economies.

It is difficult to estimate the number of academics in UK institutions working on tourism but a trawl through the 52 websites of the UK universities mentioned above reveals that more than 200 are directly involved in postgraduate departments with a tourism teaching programme, a figure that largely *excludes* those working in such related areas as Events management and Urban Planning. It also excludes most academics with a tourism interest who are situated in such traditional university departments as Geography, Anthropology, Sociology, Geography and Environmental Studies.

Supporting evidence of a different nature is found in *Ethos* (e-theses online service), which lists more than 1,500 Ph.D. theses with 'tourism' as a key word produced at more than 100 UK universities over the last three decades. As expected, most are from 'new' universities, but a substantial minority are from departments at more established universities, for example, Oxford, Cambridge, London, Exeter and Hull.

It is suggested, then, that while there are known centres of tourism studies (e.g. the Universities of Surrey and Bournemouth), academics who work on tourism are found throughout the UK, generally in departments with four or five academics focusing especially on tourism.

But are they working on 'development?' Of course, this depends on definitions, but the position taken here – and which would underpin a Tourism Study Group – is that development is not just a matter for so-called 'developing' societies. Indeed, the emergence of tourism as a major industry in the Mediterranean, numerous tropical island states, and East and Southeast Asia has been intimately related to increased prosperity, initially in Western industrial nations and, more recently, in China. The decline of English seaside resorts since the late 1950s, for example, is directly correlated to the fashionable desirability of a sun tan, increased prosperity in postwar Britain, the availability of surplus aircraft after the second World War, and the corresponding *rise* of mass tourist resorts in Greece and Spain. As a consequence, many British resorts (for example, those in the Isle of Thanet) are considered economically deprived and are now in receipt of development funds from the European Union. Elsewhere, over the last two decades, the emergence of a Chinese middle class has led to China becoming a huge source of tourists, much targeted by all European destinations, including those in the UK, as well as a major tourist-receiving nation. If one adds to this the increasingly global reach of major hotel chains and tour operations, the case for arguing that tourism is associated with global and (more or less) sustainable development, in the UK from Wales to Scotland, from John O'Groats to Land's End, seems unanswerable.

Further, tragic support for emphasising the global nature of tourism can be gleaned from the June 27th 2015 massacre of European tourists at Sousse, Tunisia, in the name of ISIL. The attacks on tourists at Luxor, Egypt (1997) and in Bali (2002 and 2005) were deliberately aimed at disrupting international tourism and, indeed, it could be argued the 9/11 attack on New York (2001) and the 7/7 attack on London (2005) were partly, designed, at least, to have a similar effect.

References

Harrison, D. (2014) *Tourism and Development: From Development Theory to Globalisation*. In A.A. Lew, C.M. Hall and A.M. Williams, eds. *The Wiley Companion to Tourism*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell: 143-154.

de Kadt, E. ed. (1979) *Tourism: Passport to Development?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

MacCannell, D. (1976) *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. London: Macmillan.

Sharpley, R. and Telfer, D. eds. (2015: second edition) *Tourism and Development: Concepts and Issues*. Bristol: Channel View Press.

Smith, V. ed. (1978) *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Tourism Alliance (2015) *UK Tourism Statistics, 2015*. London: tourism alliance.

United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) (2014) *Tourism Highlights, 2014*. Manila: UNWTO.

David Harrison
Professor of Tourism
Middlesex University
29th June 2015.