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Key Concepts in Tourism Research

DAVID BOTTERILL & VINCENT PLATENKAMP

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DAVID BOTTERILL &
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Key Concepts in Tourism Research

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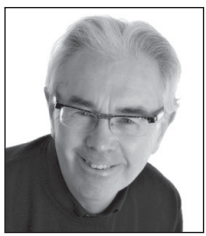
About the Authors



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Introduction

David Botterill and Vincent Platenkamp

The underlying premise in our approach to this book is that tourism research is predominately social research and we should therefore look to the social sciences for its anchor points. By placing tourism research within the social sciences we open up to a vast array of philosophical positions, academic disciplines, bodies of theory and methods. The *SAGE Encyclopaedia of Social Science Research Methods*, for example, includes over 1000 entries in three volumes and the task of selecting 33 key concepts for this book has proved a nerve-wracking challenge for us. Our final selections, and omissions, will probably be a point of contention among our readers.

The starting points for our selections are our two different intellectual frames of reference both of which are located within a Western philosophical tradition. David's engagement with tourism research has been conducted within the English-language canon of Anglo-American social science. Vincent's intellectual world is what David might call continental or European, transacted in the French and German languages and, of course, his native Dutch. We have tried to reflect both frames of reference in our choices of key concepts and hope that this results in a richness that is reflected in our list of key concepts and in the text of this book. The global reach of tourism and the concomitant spread of tourism scholarship to all parts of the world highlights our Western biases. We acknowledge that different philosophical influences from the East and the South will, over time, have a greater influence over tourism scholarship than we have been able to reflect in this edition of *Key Concepts in Tourism Research*.

We justify our choice of key concepts in two ways. For the most part, we are able to show how each of the key concepts we have selected has been applied in tourism research through a review of its application to

tourism studies. Consequentially, we can claim that they are key concepts within tourism research practice. But there is another sense in which we think our list is 'key', not just as a reflection of current practice but also as a progressive influence on the future of tourism research.

Through this book our intention is to ground tourism research practice more directly in the debates in the philosophies, theories and methods of the social sciences. As this book has progressed it has become increasingly clear to us that the emergence of tourism research in the 1960s positioned it in the social sciences at a particular juncture. What we have tried to do in our selections is to show how current practice in tourism research is informed by ideas that have been rethought through over many decades, and in some cases centuries, of intellectual endeavour.

We call this work the 'underlabouring' of tourism research. We think that our concepts are key because they connect tourism research to the still contentious claims of social science as a legitimate contributor to knowledge. Our intention here is that when reading our book tourism researchers at all levels and in all contexts will be encouraged to engage with, and contribute to, these debates. This, we think, would be a progressive move within tourism research that would help to stabilise its place in the social sciences and add maturity to any claims made about tourism knowledge.

How to Use This Book

So the time has come to choose what, and how, you are going to research the phenomenon of tourism for your thesis or dissertation. Hopefully, you will have taken courses or modules in research methods and will have practised the skills you need in order to undertake your research but you cannot, any longer, put off the choice of topic and the way you are going to investigate it. There are a bewildering variety of topics in tourism and almost as many ways of researching them, so we sympathise with your plight. The most useful general advice that we can give you at this point in your studies is to make sure you choose a topic that really interests you because it has to keep you intrigued for several months to come. We also think it is important to think about how your own strengths map against the particular skills needed for the different approaches that are available to you.

Our experiences of supervision tell us that the answers that you come up with to these two questions are not formulated as quickly as most students would like. The answers also do not arrive neatly packaged into product 'strap lines' or media 'sound bites'. It takes time for them to emerge and, more often than not, in parallel rather than one before the other. We have very often encountered students who are floundering in their attempts to come to answers for either one or both of these questions and have wondered what to say or where to send students for inspiration. We have tried asking pertinent questions to extract topics of interest or directed our students to the research journals but these have not always proved to be successful interventions, not least because they can sometimes undermine confidence. At this stage in the research process we have also found that the many excellent guides on how to do research are not what is needed, as they cannot provide that 'spark' that gets you started on a research journey.

This moment is sometimes an awkward silence in early supervisory meetings. In order to fill the silence the temptation is to risk boring our students with our own research, not always very successfully we will admit. That is not to say that we, or many of your supervisors, do not

recognise the responsibility to direct students but because we think that research output, at any level, should be an expression of you and not your supervisor. After all, supervisors are not awarded the degree, students are!

So we have written this book to help you come to those answers about your research projects. Our book follows the model of all Key Concept books in the series and is published as an extended glossary of terms that will provide a useful reference point for students embarking on explorations in tourism research. Sometimes the reactions of our students to the language of the social sciences is often hostile. They complain of a lack of consistency in the use of terms and are bewildered by the sometimes contradictory accounts of the same concept. In response, the entries in this book have been written to limit any potential confusion but, at the same time, not to shy away from the sometimes uncomfortably discursive nature of the philosophy of the social sciences.

For each key concept we provide a definition and an initial guide on its potential relevance to your research project. The relevance section draws upon the many such conversations we have had with students over the years. Then, the key concept has been applied to a range of different topics, with examples drawn from the tourism research journals. Remember, these examples show you how other researchers, some of them students, have answered those two questions of 'what' and 'how'. This is supplemented by an elaboration of the main ideas and techniques associated with each key concept.

Having done our best to simplify the concept, it is unravelled a little. First, we invite you to consider the historical development, philosophical pretext and principal claims that surround the concept. Finally, we provide a short critique of the concept, because in our experience some students sometimes become transfixed by the concept. Having got to grips with its complexities they then treat it as something fixed – a foundational entity – forgetting the all important discursive tendency to critique and argument that permeates the social sciences. A full set of references is provided for follow-up reading. For example, maybe your curiosity in the key concept might have been sparked by a particular article from the tourism journals or you may want to know more about

how the generic concept developed or can be applied. To account for both of these eventualities we separate our references into generic and tourism specific listings.

If you really are at the very beginning of finding those answers to the 'what' and 'how' questions then you might like to read this book by just dipping into two or three key concepts at a sitting. If you choose this way of using the book then we have also indicated some possible connections between the key concepts in the text by capitalising them and listing them, under a separate heading 'CROSS REFERENCES', setting up an order in which to read other key concepts from the book.

However, encouraged by reviewers of our draft manuscript to cluster the concepts in some way we propose another, more structured, way in which you might read this book. We think everyone should start by reading the entries on Empiricism and Ethical Practice because these are the bedrock of your research activities. Next, our reading of the tourism research literature indicates that one way of categorising research output is in three broad topic categories: experiences, places and organisations. What we suggest, then, is that it is possible to structure your reading of the entries in this book around each of these broad categories.

EXPERIENCES

Let us assume that you have tentatively decided to study the 'experiences' associated with tourism. These might be tourists' or employees' experiences or they may be the experiences of those living in communities who receive tourists. If you have settled on this category of topic for your research then we suggest you should read the following as a set of key concepts: Ethnomethodology, Hermeneutics, Interview/Focus Group, Narrative, Phenomenology, Repertory Grid, Survey, Symbolic Interactionism.

PLACES

If you prefer to study tourism places we suggest the following set of key concepts: Case Study, Content Analysis, Document Analysis, Interview/Focus Group.

ORGANISATIONS

If the topic of your research concerns the policies and practices of organisations here is our list of key concepts that might be particularly helpful: Action Research, Case Study, Delphi Method, Document Analysis, Evaluation Research, Grounded Theory.

Now let us take another potential starting point for organising your reading of this book. You know roughly what your topic is but you cannot decide on how to research it. If this is where you are in your thinking then dip into this set of key concepts: Autoethnography, Content Analysis, Delphi Method, Document Analysis, Experiment, Ethnomethodology, Interview/Focus Group, Narrative, Repertory Grid, Survey, Visual Methods. Conversely, your supervisor might be pushing you to set your research ideas into a particular theoretical frame. A favoured criticism by supervisors of what might be called 'superficial' research proposals is that they lack analytical depth. If this is the feedback you've been getting, then the following set of key concepts might just settle your mind and enable you to demonstrate more depth of analysis in your study: Critical Theory, Feminism, Figurationalism, Grounded Theory, Post-colonialism, Postmodernism, Symbolic Interactionism.

Our last suggestion for grouping the key concepts as a set of readings explores a central thrust of our book. As we argue in our Introduction, we think that it is important for anyone doing tourism research to recognise that they are in some small way working towards the production of new knowledge. This inevitably means that tourism researchers at all levels should engage, at an appropriate level, with the philosophy of science and the ever present debate over the contribution of the social sciences to knowledge. So we begin this group of key concepts with what many would consider the most important contemporary debate in the philosophy of science, that between Popper and Kuhn with the suggestion to read Deduction and Paradigm. To complete this, albeit selective, exploration of the philosophy of (social) science we would add the key concepts of Constructionism, Epistemology, Positivism and Realism.

In order to develop greater sophistication in your thinking, then it is time to confront the competing claims of different schools of thought in the social sciences. This can be done by reading the following key concepts

as a set: Critical Realism, Critical Theory, Experiment, Hermeneutics, Modelling, Phenomenology, Positivism. You may have heard the term 'Interpretivism' used alongside the key concepts we have included in the book. We considered a separate entry for this topic but for those students wanting a better understanding of Interpretivism we decided that we should instead recommend reading our key concepts entries for Constructionism, Hermeneutics and Phenomenology.

We can only now wish you luck in your studies and hope that *Key Concepts in Tourism Research* is a book that you will remember fondly long after your research project is complete and that you will recommend it to your fellow students, your tutors and even your libraries. No doubt we will get candid feedback from our own students, but if you have something to tell us that would improve the book, then please get in touch with us through our publisher.

NOTE TO FELLOW SUPERVISORS/TUTORS

In the processes of designing a research project there are times when both students and their supervisors might turn to this book in order to refresh their understandings of a concept or to quickly locate examples from the tourism literature that may provide comparator studies.

Reading about a single concept as a starting point for discussion in supervision and deciding if further reading is warranted is one use for the book. However, we hope that tutors will find ways of incorporating the book into research methods teaching in tourism. Although the concepts are ordered alphabetically, they might, for teaching purposes, be organised into groups of concepts and we have indicated some possible combinations above. Individually, or in small groups, students might be encouraged to take a group of key concepts, follow up on the examples of tourism research and attempt to synthesise this material for seminar discussion or as a written assignment. They might be challenged to produce a research proposal following a particular research emphasis, or to select a research topic and design two or more studies of contrasting types.

Finally, a note on our selections of key concepts and on omissions. The choices we have made are driven by our judgments of what we think are the key concepts in tourism research at this point in time. An explanation

of why we have not included a separate section on Interpretivism is given above, however, we would certainly acknowledge its recent importance in tourism scholarship. We considered the inclusion of Post-structuralism but preferred, at this stage, to treat it within the key concepts on Epistemology and Postmodernism and to include Post-structuralist argument within various sections that critique other key concepts. Just like the reviewers of the draft manuscript it is likely that, if you were writing this book, you would have included others and omitted some of our selections. Should you have particularly strong views about this we hope you will tell us as, in the event that we get the chance to revise this book in a second edition, we would always want to improve and refine it.

Action Research

Definition Action Research engages the researcher with participants in cycles of action and reflection to address issues of practical and pressing importance in their lives. It is often visualised as a circular process of planning, action and fact finding about the results of the action.

RELEVANCE

Two factors must be in place to make Action Research a viable approach. First, there must be a commitment to achieving change in a situation or organisation and second, you will need easy access to your research setting, whether it is a tourism destination or commercial or not-for-profit enterprise. To be effective, Action Research demands that you spend time in the research setting to work through one or more action cycles. If you are already involved in a tourism organisation in a voluntary or paid capacity, then you are in a great starting position provided you have the support of the organisation's leadership. Periods of workplace experience can also be turned into Action Research projects but you must discuss this with your employer or supervisor and if there is no commitment to make changes then you will need to reformulate your research strategy, perhaps by choosing another of our key concepts such as Case Study, Ethnomethodology or Grounded Theory.

APPLICATION

Given the origins of Action Research as emerging from within the study of organisations, it is likely that contemporary examples do not always reach the public domain and are documented only as internal reports. This may be a reason for the low numbers of published studies found in the literature. There are sufficient though to illustrate the two orientations of Action Research – the pragmatic and the critical/participatory.

Four studies demonstrate the pragmatic orientation described in more detail in the section on 'historical development' below. Taylor and Taylor (2008) use an Action Research approach in devising new methods for

ensuring food safety in the hospitality industry. Hastings et al. (2006) report how Action Research was employed in concert with Case Study research to effect change in the marketing practices of a small-scale tourist attractions consortia in Mid Wales. Hastings undertook her study as part of a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) between a university and a commercial partner. The aim was to create and manage a new tourism attractions consortia – Dyvi Valley Days – involving four tourist attractions in Mid Wales. Multiple case studies of tourism consortia fed into three cycles of action research. The action research was undertaken over a two-year period and involved learning from nine case study consortia. First-, second- and third-person narratives were used to develop a model of best practice in tourism consortia marketing. A checklist in the form of a series of questions that can be used by consortia to evaluate progress and overcome difficulties was produced and tested on practitioners.

Action Research offers a useful framework for conducting research during a period of consultancy and Sofield's (2007) work on the economy of the Greater Mekong region of China is a good example. Our final example is of a specific derivative of Action Research: appreciative inquiry. Raymond and Hall (2008) demonstrate the potential of appreciative inquiry through the study of good practice in volunteer tourism.

Examples of critical or participatory action research include studies into sustainable tourism in Eastern Indonesia (Cole, 2006) and community participation in planning for tourism in the Arctic regions of Canada (Stewart et al., 2008). In both of these articles the researchers demonstrate their commitment to the empowerment of indigenous communities to better benefit from tourism development. Community participation in planning for tourism is also the rationale for the use of Action Research in Naples although emancipation is not explicit in the rationale of the research (Arcidiacono and Procentese, 2005). This is also the case in an article on livelihood capacity building through an ecotourism community knowledge exchange project in the Suid Bokkeveld region of South Africa (Oettlé et al., 2004).

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Action Research emerged from the ideas of Kurt Lewin who created it as a process that would allow greater employee involvement in the workplace. Lewin described Action Research 'as a way of generating knowledge about a social system while, at the same time, attempting to change it' (Lewin as quoted in Hart and Bond, 1995: 13). As a social

scientist working in the USA in the 1930s and 1940s, Lewin was influenced strongly (and negatively) by the adoption of positivism in social science and (positively) by the ideas of Dewey, James and Pierce, three philosophers in the American school of pragmatism. Lewin's work inspired social researchers who were looking for an alternative to positivism that also incorporated the truth notion of 'practical adequacy' contained within pragmatism. Action Research reached a peak in its first phase of influence in the early 1950s.

Following a gradual decline, Action Research began its second phase of popularity when, in the 1970s, critically oriented social researchers recognised the potential of Action Research as a vehicle for the emancipation of underprivileged groups. During these developments, Action Research shifted from its pragmatic purpose to a more critical approach intent on unveiling dominant ideologies and coercive structures. The rebirth of Action Research was strongly influenced by intellectuals from Latin America, particularly Paulo Freire, and Europe, in the form of contributions to social theory from Jürgen Habermas and Michel Foucault. In the 1990s, Lewin's earlier pragmatist point of departure was recaptured in a new burst of enthusiasm for Action Research, particularly in management studies, as a part of a wider movement to democratise institutions and workplace organisations.

The debate about orientations in Action Research can also be seen as part of the challenge to the power of 'scientific experts' in society. From a critical orientation, Action Research becomes part of broader political agendas, for example, in relation to emancipating previously silent voices in debates about the environment, human rights and development. From a pragmatic orientation, Action Research is seen as contributing to, and the opening up of, the governance of institutions to a wider range of stakeholder groups and influences. This is evident in the higher status given to the knowledge of practitioners and consumers as well as in the promotion of experimental and interactive learning. These two, arguably divergent, strands in Action Research have further developed particular action research methodologies and are steering an internal critique within the action research community (see for example McNiff and Whitehead, 2006 in respect of education).

DESCRIPTION

The central idea that unifies action researchers is that it is a research approach that provides opportunity for participative and change-oriented

initiatives. What separates the pragmatic and critical methodologies begins with the position of the researcher within the project. Does s/he engage with practioners to gather their inputs yet exclude them from analysis and theory building activities, or is the researcher a co-participant along with other co-participants who jointly interpret, verify and disseminate the outcomes of the research? The distinctions between the methodologies are subtle but very real and Johansson and Lindhult (2008) detail them in terms of the dimensions of: purpose, action focus, orientation to power, research focus, development focus, and dialogue type.

Pragmatic orientation

Here the purpose is adaptation to a situation and incremental change, the action is experimentation and the research focus is dialogue and experiential learning. Although democratic dialogue is stressed, its realisation is adjusted to the practical requirements of getting the change process started. Consensus building is contained with existing structures of power. Methods such as dialogue conferences and the creation of dialogue spaces wherein the researcher takes on a 'Publican' role (Linhuld as cited in Johansson and Lindhult, 2008: 104) encourage consensus and conflict avoidance. 'Deep Slice' project groups, where individuals from different parts and levels of one or more organisations are tasked with the generation of concrete projects, can provide the start point for Action Research cycles.

Critical orientation

Emancipation is the explicit purpose and this is achieved through the methods of participatory enquiry (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). Dispute and argument are welcomed as constructive parts of the discovery of suppressive power structures. Periods of critical reflection and intervention by the researcher promote consciousness raising within the group so that it may struggle against and be liberated from these powers. The research and development focus is based on human values and far-reaching transformation.

The methods are designed to promote openness to others, for example, in the use of first-, second- and third-person inquiry. Each of these represents a different audience for the research. First-person research incorporates the personal voice of the research in first-person accounts of the research process. Here the emphasis is to foster an inquiring approach to one's own life. First- and second-person inquiry methods