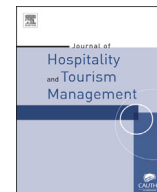




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Interdisciplinary understanding of place in tourism education: An approach of participatory learning in China

Yang Zhang^{a, *}, Yu Xiong^b

^a Block M-129, Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Macao University of Science and Technology, Avenida Wai Long, Taipa, Macau

^b School of Business Macao University of Science and Technology, Avenida Wai Long, Taipa, Macau

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the mean of place from the perspective of interdisciplinary learning in tourism education is consensus. This empirical study explored how graduate students from tourism major in China perceive place through participating field trip in YongDing earth building, China which is one of the World Cultural Heritage Site (WCHS) and developing tourism village in the in-depth interview, questionnaire survey and so on. Research result indicated that such cultural heritage village as the place not only is a geographic site but also means a political ecological system, regional cultural pattern and traditional lifestyle. Participatory learning enriched the postgraduate students' skills in both academic study and social contact which is necessary for their future career development.

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1. Introduction

One of the threshold learning outcomes for the graduates from tourism, hospitality and events is interdisciplinary inquiry which means they are required to be involved in “ways of thinking and applying a body of knowledge drawn from a number of disciplines and fields of study to sufficient depth” (Whitelaw, Benckendorff, Gross, Mair, & Jose, 2015, p. 13). For master students, this requirement mainly focus on integration of theoretical and operational knowledge of tourism as an interdisciplinary field of research and practice from the perspective of critical, advanced and contemporary. Tasks such as lead an assessment of the social, environmental and economic impact of a large tourism development are identified for evaluation of master students' interdisciplinary practice. As one of the three domains of tourism education which graduates are required for a broad understanding of the tourism industry (Dale & Robinson, 2001), researchers and educators already discussed the interdisciplinary issue from the perspective of curriculum design (Fidgeon, 2010; Inui, Wheeler, & Lankford, 2006; Tribe, 2005) and course arrangement (Gretzel, Jamal, Stronza, & Nepal, 2009) and have the consensus that tourism education should cover various

aspects and be field based. However, the students, as the receivers and stakeholders of tourism education, how they perceive to such courses and trainings, how they perform in such learning process are ignored and need empirical studies. Therefore, this study will focus on the master students in tourism major to explore what interdisciplinary knowledge and skills they obtained, such research task as the learning activity means what for them and how they perceive it.

Regarding to the development of tourism education in China, it has experienced consistent and significant growth since early 1980th due to the open door economic reform policy adopted in 1978. As stated by Du (2003, pp. 221–230), Johns and Teare (1995), Lam and Xiao (2000), Wu and Li (2006) and Zhou (1991), current demand and future growth in China place significant pressure on an education system to prepare a qualified workforce of professional management and leadership to handle the important responsibilities associated with providing quality products and services to the traveling public. There exists strong criticize to generalization of course arrangement in Chinese tourism higher education because it cause a shortage of skilled students able to meet the current discipline based demands of the labor market in the tourism industry in China and results in a lower recognition of students (Wang, Sun, & Gu, 2005; Zou, 2002). Specialization turns out to be the popular trend thus whether the curriculum in THE of China should pay attention to a breadth of knowledge or just focus

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: yangzhang@must.edu.mo (Y. Zhang), hmgjas@hotmail.com (Y. Xiong).

on tourism professional courses has become a new emergency argument. Therefore, this study will discuss the interdisciplinarity through an empirical study from the perspective of participatory learning which has been used in tourism education.

With respect to the learning ways for interdisciplinary target in tourism education, participatory learning is quite potential as it combines an ever-growing toolkit of participatory and visual methods with natural interviewing techniques and is intended to facilitate a process of collective analysis and learning (CIDT, 2001). As a systematic methodology, it covers visual technologies such as mapping, problem tree and group and team dynamic methods like focus group and participatory workshops (Pretty, 1995). Meanwhile, participatory learning also includes other complementary qualitative and quantitative methods of investigation along with technological innovation of video game, photo and software such as structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviewing, participant observation and qualitative anthropological fieldwork (Thomas, 2004). This learning way also has been identified can support new forms of classroom interaction and can serve to catalyze the engagement with dynamic systems modeling as a core feature of the education of all students (Wilensky & Stroup, 1999), and moreover can attain the goals of interdisciplinarity and motivating social practice (Marton, Dall'alba, & Beaty, 1993).

“Place” as a concept has been explored within a variety of disciplines as diverse as geography (Harvey, 1996), cultural anthropology (Altman & Low, 1992), architecture (Galliano & Loeffler, 1999; Hayden, 1997), leisure studies (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000), and forest science (Cheng & Daniels, 2003; Williams & Vaske, 2003) as well. In the context of tourism study, “place” already illustrated as interdisciplinary element with policy, power for political exploration (Hall, 1994). It is also been analyzed in the geography of tourism and recreation along with capital, environment and space (Hall & Page, 2014). Tourism entrepreneurship in essence is selling the meaning of place (Trauer & Ryan, 2005). Meanwhile, place is also a dynamic concept in the tourism study which continuously being made and reconstructed by both tourists and the suppliers (Billington, Carter & Kayamba, 2008; Suvantola, 2002). Each field of study seeks to understand how people relate to places and what connection to place means such as identity, attachment and involvement (Cheng, Kruger, & Daniels, 2003; Farnum, Hall, & Kruger, 2005).

In the tourism education literature links connection with sense of place, it can relate these concepts with real world for issues such as place learning, involvement, action and community-based conservation (Inui et al., 2006). It is necessary for tourism education to build up integrated view of place to students. Moreover, such process of establishing up for students cannot be only from textbooks and lectures. Participatory learning therefore is chosen in this study as the way to evaluate how students understand place from the perspective of interdisciplinary. At the same time, interdisciplinary inquiry as the learning outcome requirement is proposed by Australian researchers based on the education development of TH& E in Australia. Analyzing the performance of this learning requirement in Chinese master students is the research target of this study as well. Suggests for improvement of interdisciplinary understanding for Chinese master students of TH & E are provided in the last part of this article.

2. Literature review

2.1. Interdisciplinarity and sense of place

In relative to a certain academic discipline as a systematic knowledge which understanding the world by asking and answering specific types of questions (Tchudi & Lafer, 1996),

interdisciplinarity has been defined as “the capacity to integrate knowledge derived from disciplines which may have very different views as to what ‘counts’ as valid knowledge” (Jones & Merritt, 1999, p. 336). As students can and should actively construct their knowledge via their own experience and collaboration and mediation with other students and teachers (Merrett, 2000), interdisciplinary study has the potential to provide a common basis for understanding. Through taking a holistic approach, concentrating on issues and problems rather than disciplinary concepts or inquiries (Tchudi & Lafer, 1996), students can learn how to tolerate and synthesize diverse perspectives, to think critically and more creatively and to develop greater empathy for ethical and social issues (Ivanitskaya, Clark, Montgomery, & Primeau, 2002; Mansilla & Duraisingh, 2007).

Stember (1998, pp. 337–338) lays out three arguments for interdisciplinarity which are the intellectual, practical and pedagogical argument that ideas in any field are enriched by theories, concepts and methods from other fields and learning is advanced by integration within the curriculum. Thus do interdisciplinary studies play a prominent role toward diversity, cultural identities, global studies and moral and ethical issues (Gaff, 1999). Following the insights of Klein (1990) and Repko and Szostak (2016) on interdisciplinary research, the interdisciplinary research on tourism is the organization of an interface between different disciplines and bodies of knowledge in order to analyze the manifestations and the existing complexities of society's touristic dimension (Darbellay & Stock, 2012). For one thing, interdisciplinary work corresponds to a ‘mediation space’ co-constituted through interaction between different knowledge domains (Duchastel & Laberge, 1999), for another, interdisciplinary mode of research consists of capitalizing on the different disciplinary bodies of knowledge in order to more adequately understand tourism. Meanwhile, interdisciplinarity is a process of hybridization through “nomadism”, for example, the circulation of concepts and practices (Stock, Clivaz, Crevoisier, Darbellay, & Nahrath, 2011).

Hummon (1992) attributes the “theoretical complexity” of place research to the fact that “the emotional bonds of people and places arise from locales that are at once ecological, built, social, and symbolic environments” (p. 253). Researchers often approach sense of place from a distinctly disciplinary perspective. Psychology, for example, focuses on personal identity (Stedman, 2002), while sociology examines social processes and place characteristics (Gustafson, 2002; Mueller Worster & Abrams, 2005). Anthropology looks to cultural symbols (Buttimer & Seamon, 2015; Low, 2000), while geography pursues concepts such as rootedness, uprootedness, and notions of how “lived experiences” create places (Massey, 2010). Political science considers place as an impetus for community action and empowerment (Mohan & Stokke, 2000).

Through an extensive interdisciplinary literature review and preliminary field-based research, Ardoin (2006) four consistent dimensions of “sense of place” have emerged: the biophysical environment; the personal/psychological element; the social and cultural context; and the political economic milieu. First of all, the biophysical dimension of sense of place provides a context through outdoors and architecture environment (Kellert, 2005). This context evokes an almost-immediately intimate and emotional connection, creating what has been termed a spirit of place. The psychological dimension of sense of place is individual which is the most obvious and personal entrance to experiencing a place and thus received great attentions for better understand people's interactions with biophysical places (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). Gustafson (2001) assert that place identity develops through relationships not only with people, but also with places that represent the setting for everyday life. Another important psychological factor is place dependence. This functional attachment “reflects the

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