

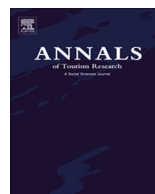


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Developments and key issues in tourism mobilities

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines key developments in recent tourism mobilities research. It begins by outlining the recent conceptualisation of tourism mobilities, arguing that it is not just that tourism is a form of mobility like other forms of mobility but that different mobilities inform and are informed by tourism. It then examines work which has been developed in terms of materialities, automobilities and new technologies. It concludes by discussing mobile methodologies and some thoughts on future research directions.

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Introduction

In March 2013 it was widely reported that ten people had been arrested in Hong Kong under new regulations restricting the amount of baby milk formula being taken into mainland China. Since 2008 when the chemical melamine contaminated baby milk formula in China led to the deaths of six babies and the sickness of an additional 300,000 babies, Chinese parents have sought supplies from outside mainland China. This has led to the phenomena of baby milk tourism, with Chinese tourists visiting the UK and Australia as well as Hong Kong, buying up baby milk formula to take back or send back to China leading to a shortage in these countries and subsequent rationing. While this ostensibly reflects food security concerns, it also highlights issues of tourism mobilities—how tourism is intimately involved and predicated on the movement of a whole range of materialities, fuelled, in part, by new forms of Chinese outbound tourism and increased aeromobilities, and how such mobilities are increasingly regulated by governments leading to immobilities.

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This paper thus reviews work from what has been termed the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller & Urry, 2006) and what has become known more recently as the study of ‘tourism mobilities’ by examining the materialities, automobilities and technologies involved in making tourism happen. These themes have been chosen as they illustrate many of the key issues involved in contemporary tourism mobilities. Tourism research has paid attention to the material through, for example, heritage tourism, but a mobilities approach demonstrates the integral importance of various materialities for tourism performances. Tourism research has also considered its relationships with transport previously, however we contend that a focus on automobilities allows us to show how discourses and practices of ‘freedom’ implied by driving underline the contemporary tourism experience in some contexts. Similarly, the use of new technologies have also given much hope of transforming tourism practices and we illustrate this by examining the ways in which mobile technologies have become integrated with being on the move but also the limitations that this also brings. Finally, we also outline some recent work which has developed what have become known as ‘mobile methodologies’. In the remainder of this introduction we develop the argument for a mobilities approach to the study of tourism.

The study of tourism has often been seen as on the periphery of the social sciences, however, the mobilities paradigm arguably allows us to place tourism at the core of social and cultural life rather than at the margins (Coles & Hall, 2006; Hannam, 2009). From this perspective, tourism mobilities are viewed as being bound up with both everyday and mundane journeys as well as with the more exotic encounters that have been the mainstay of much of the analysis in contemporary tourism studies. Tourism is then analysed not as an ephemeral aspect of social life that is practised outside normal, everyday life. Rather it is seen as integral to wider processes of economic and political development processes and even constitutive of everyday life (Coles & Hall, 2006; Edensor, 2007; Franklin, 2003; Franklin & Crang, 2001; Hannam & Knox, 2010).

It is not *just* that tourism is a form of mobility like other forms of mobility such as commuting or migration but that different mobilities inform and are informed by tourism (Sheller & Urry, 2004). In any situation, mobilities involve the movement of people, the movement of a whole range of material things, and the movement of more intangible thoughts and fantasies. Mobilities also involve the use of a range of technologies both old and new. In short, proponents of the mobilities paradigm argue that the concept of mobilities is concerned with mapping and understanding both the large-scale movements of people, objects, capital, and information across the world, as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space, and the travel of material things within everyday life simultaneously (Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006).

In terms of mapping the larger-scale movements of people, objects, capital, and information across the world a mobilities perspective allows us to analyse the connections between tourism and geopolitics critically. In terms of tourism, foreign policy discourses can have profound effects on when, who and for what reason people are able to freely cross international borders. Geopolitical discourses or ‘scripts’ as shown in a variety of institutional and popular media, are thus powerful, and as they divide up the world, can lead to conflicts over space and resources (O’Tuathail, 2002). Raoul Bianchi (2007) has analysed the relationships between tourism, the freedom to travel and the geopolitics of security. He argues that implicit in much of contemporary geopolitics is a western liberal ideal discourse of tourism as freedom (for some but not for others). He writes of how “tourism and particular destinations can become drawn into political conflicts when accumulated local grievances (linked to poverty, ethnicity or questions of religious identity) and wider geopolitical imperatives collide.” Moreover, “[w]here perhaps tourism becomes even more closely intertwined with global geopolitics is in the mapping of global risk and threats to security through the mechanism of state travel advisories” (Bianchi, 2007, p. 70).

Advisories such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in the UK are extremely powerful in portraying a dominant Western worldview. The mobilities of global tourism, then, are intimately entwined with broader geopolitical issues such as migration, inequality and indeed, climate change. From this perspective the relations between migration, return migration, transnationalism, and tourism are thus being increasingly researched (King & Christou, 2011). And, of course, the ways in which physical movement pertains to upward and downward social mobility are also central here as research on expatriates demonstrates (Butler & Hannam, 2013a). In such a context we need to examine

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