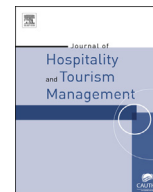


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Australian contributions to tourist behaviour studies



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ABSTRACT

It is the purpose of this review to record some of the highlights of the Australian contribution to the global flow of ideas in tourist behaviour research. The context for appreciating the contribution is formulated by recognising the fusion culture of Australian life which effectively provides a meeting ground for ideas from other continents. Four themes, and several strands of ideas within these themes, are presented for national and international consideration. There are well cited studies in tourist motivation, plentiful examples of distinctive topics and tools for appraising tourist markets, insightful approaches to embellishing and assessing on-site experiences, and a broad appreciation of the outcomes of tourism for tourists. The review is approached from the perspective of an active, immersed participant and utilises a wide variety of sources in an attempt to recognise novel concepts and material rather than recycled or locally restricted studies. Many of the research studies are well cited, a recognition that Australians not only have a place in the sun but also offer some rays of light for global friends and colleagues.

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1. Introduction

At the end of the nineteenth century the noted Australia novelist Joseph Furphy produced his magnum opus "Such is Life." It had the by line "temper democratic; bias, offensively Australian" (Clark, 1981). In the twenty first century and in Australian life there is still much of the democratic temper; arguably this means there is not an excessive concern about status within and beyond scholarly walls. What has changed is the desire to be more than offensively and fiercely nationalistic, and instead to see the work of writers, and University researchers in particular, as internationally respected and influential.

The present review about tourist behaviour research by individuals based in Australia is shaped by this desire to represent their international influence. The studies of interest have been conducted either by Australian citizens or by scholars hailing from international locations who have worked in the country for at least five years. Many countries in the world produce some tourism research, and a portion of this work considers what tourists choose to do, how they think and how they behave. It can be quickly appreciated that national studies which merely replicate work already conducted in another setting may be locally valuable, but they do tend to simply consolidate rather than extend the

knowledge base of the field. In this review, Australian studies and research efforts which follow international predecessors in the field will be of only passing interest. More directly, four substantial thematic areas in tourist behaviour studies are highlighted. It will be suggested that there are some special conceptual highlights from the Australian research addressing the themes of tourists' motivation, issues in market segmentation, understanding the on-site experience, and assessing the impacts and outcome of tourists' travel.

The originality of the contributions of Australian tourism researchers can be seen as taking one of two forms. There may be originality in some of the work done in terms of it being completed quite some time ago, thus establishing a claim for its formative and pioneering value. A second source of originality may be more contemporary. Such material deals with the fresh treatment of themes and the introduction of novel perspectives to the wider world of tourism scholarship. The review is conducted through an immersive and active process of assessing the work of many people but no direct citation data will be employed to avoid the kind of competitive fracas which such records can generate. It is not inappropriate, however, to record that ten of the scholars cited frequently have more than 1000 Google citations for their work with several recording substantially higher figures of recognition.

The scale or level of focus of this review also needs to be considered. It is the formal requirement of doctoral theses that the student produces a contribution to knowledge. The present review

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acknowledges many high quality doctoral efforts within the country, but opts to consider major streams and programs of published work rather than focussing on individual pieces. The review has been built by scanning current major tourism journals and publishers, including past issues of this journal. Additionally, attention has been given to the one-time prominent Australian journal, *The Journal of Tourism Studies* (1990–2005) and the publications of the Council for Australian Tourism and Hospitality Education conferences (1992–2015). Building on these information sources, it is the intention and the ambition of this review to delineate the more enduring, insightful and internationally appealing Australian contributions to tourist behaviour studies.

2. The Australian landscape for tourist behaviour studies

Most tourists who cross continents in the English speaking world know that there are subtle variations in the way concepts and words are used. For example, some tourism humour derives from such examples as North American listeners believing that Australians using the diminutive “ta” for thank you, are referring to a road surface; or that an English listener hearing the Australian expression “you old bastard” may see it as a slight on someone’s parentage rather than a term of affection (James, 2005). So too, the focus of our tourism research interests – the very words behaviour and experience – have shifting meanings across continents. This review uses behaviour in its widest sense to embrace physically observable acts as well as the cognitive and emotional links underpinning what people do and how they think and feel. When used in this way the term is synonymous with experience. The British and European traditions, influenced by geographers and sociologists, tend to use experience as the predominant term of interest and eschew behaviour because they believe it is linked too closely to the positivist tradition of psychology research known as behaviourism. North American scholars use the concept experience less frequently, preferring the term tourism behaviour which they effectively borrow from the rather more direct commercial interests of consumer behaviour studies.

Terminology and its precise meaning constitute one component of the landscape of Australian tourism research. An orientation to the world is another point of contextual difference and identity for Australian tourist behaviour researchers. Tribe (2009), amongst others, has documented the force fields which operate on researchers and which determine their wellbeing and choices. A distinctive feature of the Australian tourist behaviour research landscape is that the force field can be seen as open ended rather than tightly constrained. It is, for example, entirely possible for a researcher in the United Kingdom, the United States or China to write about their interest area and publish their work exclusively in the local ambit of only British, North American or Chinese tourism journals. This is not possible if an Australian academic seeks to be successful (Pearce, 2011a). Not only are there a limited number of quality local journals, and the present journal is the one clear and continuing exception, but promotion committees and scholarly acclaim is derived from making an international contribution.

The paradigms, methods and content of research interest are further examples of the academic culture of fusion which characterises studying tourism in the continent of Australia. By far the largest cohort of Australian tourist behaviour researchers had backgrounds in psychology, education or marketing rather than the more theoretical and conceptual leanings of sociology and anthropology. Australian based scholars educated in these psychology, marketing and education fields were able to benefit from the fusion of lines of international inquiry since these study areas were built on studies on both sides of the Atlantic. Fusion also derives from Australia’s place in the geopolitical world which involves a

necessary national economic orientation to Asia (FitzGerald, 1997). In tourism, the economic importance of the Asian market can be appreciated by the simple statistic that 40% of the country’s international tourists are from Asia (UNWTO, 2015). This figure is substantially higher than for any other country in the western world; only New Zealand at 27% has a comparable dependence. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that Australian tourist behaviour research benefits from a diversity of international influences and interests.

One result of these influences is that there is, arguably, a tolerance of research styles, approaches, themes and content in tourist behaviour research in Australia. A review of 5 years of CAUTHE conference papers (2011–2015) provides evidence. From 132 papers selected as relevant to tourist behaviour, 41% are post positivist and highly empirical, 36% are descriptive and interpretive case studies and discussions, and 23% are attempts to develop critical theory or explore new concepts and topics for further treatment. Asian themes and interests are evident in 17% of the tourist behaviour papers and Asian names, predominantly but not exclusively postgraduate students, are visible on 22% of the papers.

3. Notable contributions

3.1. Tourist motivation

It requires effort to visit Australia. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that there has been a long standing interest in why tourists travel to destinations such as Australia, effectively a question of tourist motivation. The Australian researcher Leiper (1979) constructed a tourism systems model to contextualise the flow of tourists and frame tourist behaviour studies. In this foundation piece, Leiper conceptualised the key role of tourist motivation as the true driver of tourism flows. Early debates about tourist motivation also flowed across the continents with the work of Dann (1977, 1981), Plog (1974), and Crompton (1979) being challenged by Pearce (1980), Smith (1990a, 1990b), and later Ryan (1998). A key Australian contribution compared tourist motivation theories and outlined seven criteria for a good conceptual understanding of the topic which was feasible for pragmatic research use (Pearce, 1992). The incorporation of these principles and the continuing authorship of the pleasure motivation chapter in one of tourism’s original textbooks has helped communicate these Australian perspectives (McIntosh, Goeldner, & Ritchie, 1995).

The specific Australian development to arise from these discussions was, in time, the travel career pattern (TCP) approach proposed by Pearce and Lee (2005) and summarised in Pearce (2005, 2011b). The travel career pattern approach built on and improved on an earlier travel career ladder proposal. At core, the travel career pattern work systematically reorganized and empirically connected a wide range of tourist motivation items and offered a dynamic link between sets of motivation factors and tourists’ age and previous travel experiences. The approach continues to be developed, with further conceptual links to neuroscience (Pearce, 2011b), and the addition of specialist factors relating to health (Pearce & Panchal 2011) and the Chinese market (Li, Pearce, & Zhou, 2015).

A core layer of motives was identified at the heart of the TCP model. These motives, specifically to escape and relax, to experience novelty and to build relationships, were relatively unaffected by how much travelling the participants had experienced. There were further motives that were structured into middle and outer layers of importance. For the most experienced travellers, the middle layer of motives such as for self-development and involvement with nature were more important than the outer layer, which included such motives as autonomy and romance. By way of

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