



Progress in tourism planning and policy: A post-structural perspective on knowledge production



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Progress in tourism planning and policy is assessed using a post-structural approach.
- A thematic bibliographic analysis and a critical policy archaeology was used.
- We reveal the constitutive grid of forces that shape policy knowledge.
- Progress is shaped by problematization and social regularities.
- A paradox of policy problematization is uncovered.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines progress in tourism planning and policy knowledge and identifies gaps and future directions for research. The study employs a post-structuralist perspective presented in two analytical movements: a bibliographic study of tourism policy and planning publications in Scopus and Science Direct and thematic analysis, plus an archaeological excavation. This combined approach pays attention to the disruptions, silences and diversity of knowledge in tourism policy and planning. It highlights the way tourism planning and policy has been problematized and reveals the social regularities shaping the production of tourism planning and policy knowledge. Multi-disciplinary, mainstream subjects related to destination development and management dominate while critical analysis of economic and political structures, interests and values is lagging. The results point to an urgent need to progress tourism planning and policy towards greater visibility, legitimacy and importance in tourism studies through more critical engagement with tourism public policy and planning practice.

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1. Introduction

Tourism planning and policy is, arguably, one of the most significant influences on how tourism develops, who wins and loses, and how benefits and impacts of tourism are distributed (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007; Hall & Jenkins, 1995). Yet what do we really know about progress in tourism planning and policy knowledge? How has it developed, and what are the influences upon the particular trajectories that have emerged? Tourism researchers frequently point to the policy implications of their research and offer normative guidance on what should be done. Few confront in a reflexive manner how they have problematized the issues and the

thinking that has lead to the guidance they offer. This paper takes as its starting point that tourism planning and policy knowledge is conditioned by social factors, and that these factors influence how problems are identified, what research approaches are adopted, and, ultimately, what sort of guidance emerges. Any assessment of progress in tourism planning and policy must therefore commence with an exploration of these influences on knowledge.

This paper responds to this need for a better understanding of progress in tourism planning and policy knowledge. The paper takes an innovative policy archaeology approach (see Scheurich, 1994) for which justification is provided in the next section. We argue here that scientific, positivistic methods, such as linear historiographies, are just one approach to understanding progress in knowledge, and that alternative approaches such as we propose are generally eschewed but much needed. The paper then goes on to present a bibliographic review of literature that provides a thematic

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overview of contributions to the field. It also illustrates the challenges of traditional bibliographic approaches that ‘measure’ progress in terms of numbers of publications and linear notions of knowledge production. The subsequent section goes on to conduct an archaeological excavation of tourism planning and policy knowledge with an explicit focus on exposing the socio-political influences on our knowledge production as tourism researchers (see Foucault, 1969, 1970; Scheurich, 1994). In particular, the paper takes a post-structuralist and critical policy sociology approach (Gale, 2001), differentiating itself from traditional, narrative approaches commonly used to explain the evolution of tourism planning and policy (cf. Dredge & Jenkins, 2007; Dredge, Jenkins, & Whitford, 2011; Hall & Zapata-Campos, 2014; Jenkins, Hall, & Knono, 2014). Such approaches often are framed within a particular cultural and institutional setting, they are often linear explanations, and therefore do not adequately take into account the influence of complex, multilayered, multi-sectoral shifts in ideas that occur in what Luhmann (1995) would call different “social interaction systems”. The critical social approach we offer here is also a ‘partial’ view, because the complexity of different episodes of knowledge production in different interacting systems makes a comprehensive approach difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Nevertheless, such critical perspectives are especially important, as they are largely absent in tourism planning and policy, and can assist in terms of identifying broader public good implications (see also Joas & Knöbl, 2014).

The paper’s objectives are therefore twofold: (1) To present an alternative, policy archaeology approach to map progress in tourism planning and policy knowledge construction since the middle of last century when tourism became part of the mainstream public policy agenda, particularly in many economically developed countries; and (2) To identify gaps and potential future directions for tourism planning and policy research. This is no easy task since tourism planning and policy is inter/multi/transdisciplinary in character, and draws from organizational studies, political science, business management, planning, policy studies, regional development, geography, economics and sociology, resulting in a rich but highly fragmented landscape of theoretical and applied research. The complexity and fluidity of this knowledge domain and the absence of clear boundaries is a challenge that this paper confronts head on in making sense of progress in tourism planning and policy knowledge. However, given the vast span of academic fields and disciplines that contribute to this study, a comprehensive, systematic analysis of all forms and approaches to tourism planning and policy within a journal length article is clearly beyond our reach. We adopt instead a social construction of knowledge approach that focuses more on the evolution and characteristics of tourism related policy and planning in the academic domain, rather than addressing all aspects such as disaster planning and hazard mitigation policies, urban planning approaches such as comprehensive/master plans, historic preservation planning, corporate strategic planning, marketing planning, etc. A critical historiographic and archaeological methodology is employed to help identify what problems, subjects, and themes are socially legitimized in planning and policy study, i.e., what the field itself considers acceptable research and what’s missing in (research) action.

Further exacerbating attempts to assess knowledge in this subfield is the shifting landscape of policy and planning related processes that result in tourism policy. Researchers have often cited Dye’s (1976) position that “policy is anything governments choose to do or not to do” (e.g. see Hall, 1994), an approach that has placed government at the centre of investigations. However an increasing number of scholars have sought to decentre government, raising important questions about a range of issues including the rise in the

new (collaborative) public sector and aspects such as power, influence, interests, values and agendas (c.f. Airey & Ruhanen, 2014; Bramwell, 2006; Bramwell & Meyer, 2007; Dredge, 2010; Dredge & Whitford, 2011; Elliot, 1997; Mosedale, 2011). In the process it is now widely held that policy cannot be understood independently from the rise of corporate influence, processes of globalisation, neoliberal public management, networked governance and public-private partnerships. Not surprisingly, tourism planning and policy research has now moved beyond an analysis of what governments choose to do or not to do, to incorporate a much deeper appreciation of broader geographical, sociological, political and economic shifts. Against this background, this paper takes a critical and creative approach to assessing progress in tourism planning and policy research. It moves beyond a sequential or chronological analysis to explore the multiple knowledges and foci that have contributed to the field, and identifies the grid of constitutive forces that are at play in shaping and legitimizing what constitutes knowledge and progress in this complex, interdisciplinary, multi-scalar domain of academic research.

2. Approach

2.1. What is progress?

This paper acknowledges that what can pass as an informed account of ‘progress’ can often lack a sense of critical distance or reflexivity about its own production of truth and its claims to knowledge (Ball, 1997; Gale, 2001). ‘Progress’ is inherently a modernist project, and its political, cultural and sociological dimensions have been much debated (c.f. Wagner, 2010; Woods, 1907). For example, economists have conceptualized progress in terms of an increase in economic production and consumption; political thought in Western literature has emphasized progress as achieving individual autonomy and collective self-determination; and social thought has conceptualized progress as meeting current social needs (i.e. education, health, life-expectancy, etc.) and the capacity to adapt to future needs. In another vein, critical thought has examined progress in terms of addressing those factors persisting in society that silence, marginalise or disadvantage certain groups in achieving the above political and social goals. Thus, a coherent solid notion of progress has never really existed, and discussions of post-modern pluralism and liquid modernity have weakened these discourses even further (Bauman, 2000). For some, the absence of standards or accepted wisdom with respect to how policy change might be measured and evaluated represents a slide into relativism. Multiple perspectives on progress become the norm and for some, the moral and ethical implications of not being able to assess whether progress is good or bad draws us closer to nihilism (Rule, 1997). As a result, attempts to assess progress in tourism planning and policy are caught in the crosshairs of this debate between solid and liquid notions of progress. In this paper we acknowledge the difficulty of defining progress but argue that knowledge is cumulative and cannot be known simply through linear, scientific methods and modernist values of “progress” in terms of growth of scientific knowledge (Lyotard, 1979). Progress in tourism planning and policy research is the sum of socially constructed knowledge in the field and is not the movement from one state to a higher or better state whereby previous ideas and understandings are discarded as might occur in a Kuhn-like scientific revolution (Kuhn, 1996). The entrenched post-positivism and quantitative methodologies striving for scientific, generalized ‘solutions’ in tourism studies has only recently been challenged by interpretive and critical traditions that call out to stop and more carefully examine the structure and archaeology of the sub-fields that are emerging, and the legitimation of knowledge and

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