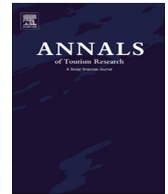




ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

## Annals of Tourism Research

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/atoures](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/atoures)

## ANT: A decade of interfering with tourism

René van der Duim<sup>a,\*</sup>, Carina Ren<sup>b</sup>, Gunnar Thór Jóhannesson<sup>c</sup><sup>a</sup> Wageningen University & Research, Cultural Geography, Droevendaalsesteeg 3, Building number 101/GAIA, PO Box 47, 6700 AA Wageningen, The Netherlands<sup>b</sup> Aalborg University Copenhagen, Tourism Research Unit, Department of Culture and Global Studies, A. C. Meyers Vænge 15, DK-2450 Copenhagen SV, Denmark<sup>c</sup> University of Iceland, Askja v/Sturlugötu, 101 Reykjavík, Iceland

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 30 November 2016

Revised 8 March 2017

Accepted 17 March 2017

## Keywords:

Actor-network theory

Ontology

Relational materialism

## ABSTRACT

Ten years ago actor-network theory (ANT) entered this journal. To illustrate how the relational ontology and sensibilities of ANT lend themselves to particular kinds of research, we first interrogate the main controversies as a way to open up and discuss the main premises of ANT. These debates concern the status and agency of objects and non-humans, ANT's denial of the explanatory power of social structures, and the political implications of ANT. Second we present ANT's relevance for tourism studies and discuss what ANT 'does' in practice. After summarizing a decade of relations between ANT and tourism, we conclude by tracing three future trajectories of how we have 'moved away with' ANT into new areas of discovery.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

Ten years ago, in September 2007, this journal published an article in which actor-network theory (ANT) was introduced as an alternative way of looking at and researching tourism. In this article, [Van der Duim \(2007\)](#) proposed that tourism should be seen in terms of *tourismscapes*, contingently assembled and interdependent socio-material configurations consisting of people, organizations, objects, technologies, and spaces. These tourismscapes are economic, physical, technological, political, spatial and social at the same time and "should not be reduced to any of these individual 'factors'" (see [Urry, 2016](#): 62–63). Before this entry, a small number of forays had already been made where ANT was translated into the realm of tourism studies ([Cloeke & Perkins, 2005](#); [Franklin, 2004](#); [Jóhannesson, 2005](#); [O'Neill & Whatmore, 2000](#)). Soon, they were succeeded by others, notably ([Ren, 2010](#); [Ren, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010](#)). Although differing in their use of ANT, these early accounts provided alternative descriptions of tourism development and its implications for and relationship with society and space. They did so by taking the role of materialities and non-humans into account and hence brought forth diverse relational orderings of tourism. Over a decade and through such studies, ANT has managed to interfere with tourism research, tourism realities and tourism futures as ANT has gradually—and in the last few years increasingly—been translated and performed in the field of tourism studies where it has raised interest as well as controversies.

The latter is illustrated by one of the reviewers of the aforementioned 2007 article, arguing that:

as a celebratory display of the impenetrability of advanced postmodern vocabularies, this manuscript is a virtuoso performance. As a meaningful contribution to human understanding, to actual *communication* of scholarship, this manuscript is a dismal failure. Thus, the real question is not the nature of the ultimate recommendation requested of reviewers but rather a question for the editor: what does *Annals* want to be? Is it to be the outlet where members of a select guild

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [rene.vanderduim@wur.nl](mailto:rene.vanderduim@wur.nl) (R. van der Duim), [ren@cgs.aau.dk](mailto:ren@cgs.aau.dk) (C. Ren), [gtj@hi.is](mailto:gtj@hi.is) (G.T. Jóhannesson).

display their skills at parlor games designed solely for the amusement of fellow guild members, or, is it to be an outlet for meaningful communication of scholarship? (Anonymous reviewer of the 2007 article *Tourismscapes*, 2006).

This reviewer pointed especially to the 'language' of ANT studies, which sometimes comes across as impenetrable. We will come back to some of the reasons for this below, but at the moment we argue that a specific ANT-jargon is not necessary to make use of the toolbox it offers. What is essential is an interest in exploring tourism relations.

Eventually the article on *tourismscapes* was published as the other three reviewers were far more positive; acknowledging the potential contribution the article could make to rethink tourism and tourism research. This also reflected an earlier decision taken by the editorial board of this journal to dedicate the journal to developing theoretical constructs, reflecting a broader 'conceptual turn' in tourism studies (see also [Cohen & Cohen, 2012](#)).

The debate continues as ANT still interrupts common understanding of the role and value of social science research. As [Michael \(2017: 1\)](#) recently summarizes: "whether as a positive resource or source of irritation, ANT has become a conceptual framework (or latterly, an analytic and methodological sensibility) that many writers feel obliged to reference." Tourism studies are no exception. For instance, in a 2015 discussion of ANT on the online forum of TriNet, Juergen Gnoth questioned the relevance of ANT for tourism research by asserting that "it does not really bring anything new to the table as far as I can see, other than a renewed consciousness for positivists". This statement echoes much previous critique against ANT and expresses some of the controversy surrounding the approach.

The aim of this article is to review ANT's entanglements with and effects on tourism studies as well as point towards potential future trajectories of ANT and tourism research. The question 'what ANT brings new to the table' serves as a unifying thread of our discussion. We will not explicate what ANT definitely 'is', but describe ANT as a multiple, complex and often disparate resource "that opens up a space for asking certain sorts of methodological, empirical, analytic and political questions about the processes of the (more-than) social world" ([Michael, 2017: 3](#)). Using ANT as a tool, or a travelling device, to move along the actor-network of 'ANT and tourism studies', we will analyse the effects of the encounters between ANT and tourism studies; effects which result from the (net)working of researchers and authors, a series of overlapping networks (of scholars, schools of thought) and non-human things (like books and articles) that are in constant flux—appearing and disappearing, joining and parting (see for a similar approach [Ren et al., 2010; Tribe, 2010](#)).

On our journey, we start by discussing some of the basic premises of ANT, revisiting some of the principle characteristics of ANT inspired studies. Those are the grounds that have both attracted interest and sparked controversy in different corners of the social sciences. We will attend to some of the main points of critique as a way to further open up and discuss the potentials of ANT. We will then turn to tourism studies to illustrate and discuss the relevance of ANT for tourism studies. Third and final, we will explore and discuss the workings of ANT in practice. We conclude by summarizing ten years of ANT and tourism studies and sketch out potential trajectories of ANT in tourism research.

## Conceptual controversies

### *Following ANT*

As has been pointed out, to describe ANT as a whole or a unified approach is somewhat a betrayal ([Baiocchi, Graizbord & Rodríguez-Muñoz, 2013; Law, 2007; Law & Singleton, 2013; Michael, 2017](#)). In [Law's \(2007: 2\)](#) words: "there is no 'it'. Rather it is a diaspora that overlaps with other intellectual traditions" making it difficult (and undesirable) to situate ANT once and for all or describe its development in a linear way. Below, we touch on three issues that illustrate the conceptual controversies of ANT related to its advancement in the social sciences: 1) the social status and agency of objects and non-humans, 2) ANT's denial of the explanatory power of social structures and its insistence on a 'weak theory' approach and 3) the political implications of ANT.

### *Objects and agency: doing worlds with things*

The principle of general symmetry is one of the basic premises of ANT which has perhaps spurred the most critical debate between proponents and opponents of ANT (see for example [Elder-Vass, 2008; Fine, 2005; Gingras, 1995; Haraway, 1997; Latour, 1999; Law, 1999; Murdoch, 1997](#)). This principle recommends "not to change registers when we move from the technical to the social aspects of the problem studied" ([Callon, 1986: 200](#)) or, in other words, that *analytically* human actors are treated in the same ways as other (non-human) entities. In ANT, there is no pure 'human' society but only heterogeneous assemblages ([Latour, 2005](#)). In both an ontological and analytical sense, the social is inseparable from the material ([Latour, 1991](#)).

The descriptions emerging from symmetrical analysis provides us with a new outlook on our field of study in which a variety of entities are continuously contributing to the re-enactment of the social by making the networks possible and durable ([Callon & Latour, 1981](#)).

This relational ontology of ANT in which humans and non-humans are analytically perceived as equally able to create effects has often been misunderstood as the assertion that 'things act'. Not surprisingly it has concerned and provoked the scholarly masses. Ingold, for example, has criticised what he sees as conflation of living organisms and inert objects ([Ingold, 2008](#)). While agreeing that agency is a relational effect, Ingold maintains that its essence lies in "bodily movement

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5107847>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5107847>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)