



Tourists, mobilities and paradigms



David Harrison

Middlesex University, Business School, The Burroughs, Hendon, London, NW4 4BT, United Kingdom

H I G H L I G H T S

- Kuhnian paradigms are defined by their exclusivity and incommensurability.
- Much debate has centred on the existence of paradigms in the social sciences.
- Some claim the New Mobilities Paradigm (NMP) in tourism studies avoids ethnocentricity.
- But tourism scholars do not ignore emerging societies and NMP is not a paradigm.
- It is a valid, non-exclusive addition to Western social science and tourism studies.

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Kuhn's perception of paradigms changed over time, and eventually he considered the exemplar to be a defining feature of specialised scientific communities, the sole arbiters of scientific progress, who possess a shared lexicon, more or less incommensurable to non-members. The ensuing debate as to whether or not paradigms, including the new mobilities paradigm (NMP), are found in the social science is summarised, and claims it is of special relevance to tourism studies are examined. Authenticity has indeed been a key concept, but the 'discourse of authenticity' has not dominated tourism studies, and Western and Asian scholars, despite a slow start, are now increasingly and successfully applying Western social science concepts to Asian (especially Chinese) tourism without recourse to a 'Non-Western' or 'Asian' paradigm. However, while 'mobilities' is not a paradigm, the NMP is a useful perspective that is commensurable with different theoretical approaches to tourism and other forms of travel.

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1. Introduction: KUHN and paradigms

Published more than five decades ago, Kuhn's *'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions'* (1962) is a twentieth century classic. Its central thesis, on changes in scientific thinking, has been subject of much discussion and numerous revisions, many by Kuhn himself (1970a, 1970b, 1970c, 1974, 1987, 2000, 2012). Moreover, while he was not the only philosopher of science to question 'the received view' of scientific theories (Suppe, 1977, pp. 4–5), his work on paradigms and paradigm change has been especially important, reportedly changing the prevailing image of science (Hacking, 2012: xxxvii).

When first discussing 'normal science,' Kuhn (1962) portrayed it as passing through four stages: first, a more or less random collection of facts; secondly, a pre-paradigm stage, characterised by

competing schools of thought; thirdly, a period when one school's paradigm becomes pre-eminent and, finally, normal science, when an agreed world view and standard methods of problem-solving comprise a paradigm into which newcomers to the science are socialised. A period of consensus and stability follows: the dominant paradigm is unquestioned, problem-solving more efficient, and progress in accumulating scientific knowledge – as defined by the scientific community – is made. Eventually, however, disagreements emerge over the problems to be solved; new terms emerge, old ones are redefined, and there is 'misunderstanding' among different schools of thought. A period of crisis ensues, alternative paradigms emerge which are incommensurable with the dominant paradigm and, through argument or (more) conversion, there is a revolutionary shift in (some) scientists' world views. Eventually, 'after the last holdouts have died, the whole profession will again be practising under a single, but now different, paradigm' (Kuhn, 2012, p. 151).

E-mail address: davidharrison53@btinternet.com.

2. Problems with paradigms

As indicated in the following pages, Kuhn's work stimulated immediate debate and prompted him to make substantial revisions in his position. However, the issues continue to centre on how far paradigms are characterised by mutual incommensurability, whether they change through conversion to new ways of thinking or because previous theories have been disproved or falsified (Bird, 2013; Toulmin, 1970) and, for present purposes, how far the social sciences are characterised by paradigms and paradigm change. This debate is especially relevant to tourism studies, both theoretically and in matters of empirical research for, as shown below, in recent years several tourism scholars have advanced strong claims that a mobilities perspective is, in effect, a new and more appropriate paradigm for the study of tourism, especially in non-Western societies.

The overall purpose of this paper is to assess the validity of such claims. However, first it is necessary to examine Kuhn's changing views on the nature of paradigms and then to summarise arguments as to how far paradigms exist in the social sciences. This provides the context for asking how far what is claimed to be the 'New Mobilities paradigm' is indeed a paradigm in any meaningful Kuhnian sense, rather than a useful perspective that is quite commensurable with different theoretical and empirical approaches to tourism and other forms of travel.

At the outset, it should be noted that all disputants, including Popper and Kuhn, who differ in many other respects, accept that natural sciences *are* sciences (Kuhn, 1970c, pp. 2,3,6; Popper, 1970). However, soon after *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was published, contradictions in Kuhn's concept of paradigm became evident (Masterman, 1970, p. 61). Consequently (Kuhn, 1970b, 1974, pp. 459–482; Hacking, 2012: xvii–xxv), he redefined 'paradigm' as both a disciplinary matrix and exemplar. The former is the global or world view of an independent scientific community and includes symbolic generalisations, shared commitments to 'particular models,' and shared values (Kuhn, 1970a, pp. 173–208, pp. 182–185). The fourth component of the disciplinary matrix is the exemplar, the second and narrower sense in which Kuhn initially used the term paradigm. This is a template for 'concrete problem-solutions,' accepted by the scientific group, taught to students of science, and is the guide to their research activities (Kuhn, 1970a, 1974, pp. 173–208, p. 186, pp. 459–482, p. 463).

Paradigms, then, are disciplinary matrices and, more locally, exemplars, and in both senses they are the property of the appropriate scientific community, which functions 'as a producer and validator of sound knowledge' (Kuhn, 1974, pp. 459–482, p. 463). As Kuhn puts it: 'A paradigm is what the members of a scientific community, and they alone, share' (1974: 460). The community is defined by its disciplinary matrix, by its world view, underpinned by commonly held commitments and values, and by its dominant exemplar, which is the community's accepted way of solving problems.

Another issue is how much dissent over problem-solving approaches among adherents to an exemplar can be accommodated before different problems and the need for different solutions are perceived. After all, even within normal science, with its shared commitments and value consensus, agreement is never total. Unfortunately, neither Kuhn nor his supporters resolved this matter. Perhaps, as Hacking notes, new disciplines are to some extent mutually incomprehensible (2012: xxxiii), but that simply fudges the question: at what *point* does incommensurability across paradigms (both as world views and exemplars) occur?

However, Kuhn does suggest how incommensurability might be approached. In particular, he links paradigm change to the acquisition of a new language. As competing paradigms emerge, and old

terms take on new meanings, some adherents of the previously accepted paradigm familiarise themselves with the new language, slipping into it 'without a decision having been made' (Kuhn, 2012, p. 203). But bilingualism is not enough. The emergent paradigm will be 'native' only to the newly-initiated, for whom it is, so to speak, a first language. By contrast, those who once accepted the earlier paradigm—even those who are bilingual – remain outsiders, 'foreigners in a foreign environment' (Kuhn, 2012, p. 203), until they experience conversion and make the 'gestalt switch' which, for Kuhn, is 'at the heart of the revolutionary process' (2012: 203).

In effect, Kuhn effectively abandoned the notion of paradigm, especially as a disciplinary matrix, and focused on incommensurability, which he defines as 'a sort of untranslatability, localized to one or another area in which two lexical taxonomies differ' (Kuhn, 2000, p. 93). Every scientific community has a shared lexicon, which validates its standards and activities and, simultaneously, maintains 'its isolation from practitioners of other specialities' (Kuhn, 2000, p. 98). Knowledge across scientific communities, with different lexical taxonomies, is *more or less* commensurable, but the *extent* incommensurability occurs depends on the emergence of new forms of normal science, and overlap in scientific lexicons decreases *as scientific communities become more specialised*. The greater the specialisation, the more incommensurability is encountered.

Scientific communities exist at different levels. For Kuhn, the most global is 'the community of all natural scientists' (2012: 176), though it could be argued that, above this, there is an even wider community, comprised of scientists of all backgrounds who follow science as 'a vocation' (Weber, 1948, pp. 129–156). The next level is made up of 'the main scientific professional groups' (physicists, chemists, astronomers, and so on), followed by such major sub-groups as organic chemists and radio astronomers (Kuhn, 2012, pp. 176–177). However, it is only *below* this level that normal science is found; here, in the world of specialist conferences, peer-reviewed papers, citations and interest-based networks, are 'the producers and validators of scientific knowledge' (Kuhn, 2012, p. 177), and it is into these communities, the arbiters of scientific progress (Kuhn, 2012, p. 205), that newcomers are socialised and converts welcomed.

3. Paradigms and the social sciences

Kuhn was reportedly horrified at how social scientists 'misappropriated' and 'mangled' his theory of paradigms (Walker, 2010, p. 433). He recognised commonalities in the development of natural sciences and other fields of endeavour, 'none necessarily unique to science,' but considered it was their '*conjunction*' which set the scientific activity apart' (Kuhn, 2012, p. 208 My emphasis). More particularly, he believed social and natural sciences differed in several key respects (Kuhn, 2012, p. 164). The former, categorised by him as 'proto-sciences' (1970b: 244), are comprised of competing schools, lack concrete achievements and a single, dominant paradigm (either worldview or exemplar), and have not built on the work of 'classics' of the field. In addition, social scientists must continually reinterpret inherently unstable socio-political systems (Kuhn, 2000, p. 223), and seek validation of their choice of subject matter and their findings from *outside* their communities, rather than from their peers who, in normal science, are the sole validators of progress (Kuhn, 2012, p. 164).

Despite such objections, many social scientists persisted – and persist – in seeking paradigms, especially in the sense of a disciplinary matrix (even though it was a concept Kuhn largely abandoned). Van den Berghe, disillusioned with social theory, suggested the 'paradigm of evolutionary biology' should be bridged 'with several of the major lines of thinking in the social sciences,

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