



Planning for tranquil spaces in rural destinations through mixed methods research



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Advocates the use of MMR in addressing industry issues.
- MMR facilitates extensive access to visitors, residents & authorities.
- Exemplifies use of MMR in mapping tranquillity as a planning tool.
- Demonstrates utility of MMR to planning authorities & heritage organisations.
- Tranquillity aligned with natural environment; nontranquillity, manmade sounds & sights.

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ABSTRACT

There is a view that applied researchers produce more relevant findings for practitioners in the tourism industry if they use quantitative methods. This paper claims that findings relevant to industry can be produced through the use of qualitative methods of data collection, and indeed a unique perspective is offered by qualitative research that a quantitative approach may not produce. Furthermore, a mixed methods approach to research combines the advantages offered by both qualitative and quantitative research, and is advocated as an appropriate way forward when both types of data are needed. Using a unique mixed-methods study of the meaning of tranquillity to visitors to and authorities and residents in Dorset, Southern England, this paper illustrates the value of both qualitative and quantitative data to tourism planners. The study reveals that tranquillity was most commonly aligned to the natural environment whereas non-tranquillity concerned both sounds and sights of manmade origin.

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1. Introduction

Their review of the top tourism journals (until 1996) led Riley and Love (2000) to conclude that quantitative research dominated the tourism literature, despite a growing recognition of the value of qualitative research. Furthermore, in journals aimed at solving industry problems, such as *Tourism Management*, there were fewer qualitative-based articles; these were more prominent in journals with a social science orientation and mission, such as the *Annals of Tourism Research*. Riley and Love (2000) found that

applied researchers were more likely to use quantitative methods or to use qualitative research simply as a precursor to subsequent quantification; there is a view that qualitative methods could not produce findings that would be useful to industry. The tourism industry requires findings that can translate into action and there is mistrust of case-study, non-generalisable findings (Riley & Love, 2000), despite their use in generating theory in emergent fields of research (Riessman, 2008).

A careful review of two leading tourism journals indicates that the state of tourism research and the methodologies used has changed somewhat. Tribe and Xiao stated in 2011 that 60% of papers in the *Annals of Tourism Research* embrace a qualitative or interpretive design. The two most dominant methods used by researchers continue to be interviews and participant observation

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though in more recent volumes of the journal, the following approaches have also appeared: grounded theory, focus groups, phenomenology, photography, netnography, autoethnography, and feminist memory work. In addition, [Tribe, Xiao, and Chambers \(2012\)](#) point to a 15% contribution of conceptual/review articles to the journal in 2011–2012. As [Xiao and Smith \(2006\)](#) observe, the *Annals of Tourism Research* is dedicated to promoting theoretical constructs. The journal also sees the development of methodological sophistication as part of its remit, and indeed, recent issues point to a shift towards a radical, postmodern perspective on data collection, analysis, display and authorial position. Furthermore, the journal now accepts the use of the first person, if this is consistent with the method used ([Tribe & Xiao, 2011](#)). Such a decision will facilitate the publication of reflexive research accounts, which are still lacking in the tourism literature ([Pocock, 2015](#); [Pritchard & Morgan, 2007](#)).

[Riley and Love \(2000\)](#) indicated an under-representation of qualitative-based studies in *Tourism Management* until 1999, with only 5% of articles being based on qualitative research: a review of the journal shows that this situation persisted for some years. However from Volume 26 the journal would start to reflect the diversity of approaches used by tourism qualitative researchers. There has been a move towards diversity in method, as advocated by Ryan in his editorial to mark the journal's 30th volume ([Ryan, 2009](#)). In fact, the division between quantitative and qualitative papers is now more or less even in many issues, with roughly a third of papers based on quantitative research, a third on qualitative research and a third on mixed methods research. Furthermore, one could argue that this journal's representation of the diverse methods used by tourism researchers is more fair than that of the *Annals of Tourism Research*.

The notion that *Tourism Management* is reluctant to accept papers based on more radical approaches because of its mission to address industry issues appears to have shifted. The following approaches have been used in addition to interviewing, observation and focus groups: netnography, grounded theory, autoethnography, phenomenology, narrative inquiry, hermeneutics and scenario planning. Also of note is that the first person is occasionally used to report qualitative findings, in keeping with the importance attached by qualitative researchers to reflexivity. Indeed, in their paper on constructivism [Ryan and Gu \(2010\)](#) call for a more reflexive voice in tourism research. Thus, there appears to be some convergence between *Tourism Management* and the *Annals of Tourism Research* towards acceptance of the authorial presence in tourism research papers, bringing the field in line with other disciplines such as anthropology and sociology. As Xiao and Smith assert ([2006](#)) and [Cohen \(2013\)](#), tourism is a young field that is keen to achieve the rigour associated with more established disciplines.

Despite the analysis offered above, there is an enduring view that the bias towards quantitative studies still exists ([Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015](#)). Tourism research is still hampered by a bias towards 'hard science' with which quantitative research is associated, and against the 'soft' science associated with qualitative research. [Dolnicar and Ring \(2014\)](#) also indicate a continuing bias towards quantitative methods given their utility to managers, especially in the area of tourism marketing, which occupies a third of content in the leading tourism journals. [Lynch \(2005\)](#) meanwhile claims that qualitative research continues to be under-represented in hospitality research, as reflected in the leading hospitality journals. [Ren, Pritchard, and Morgan \(2010\)](#) and [Pritchard and Morgan \(2007\)](#) state that the characterisation of the tourism research field as a divided community, based on those who are oriented towards or against a business management approach, is restrictive and naïve. Perhaps however concerns over the value of and editorial receptivity towards qualitative research explain why mixed

methods research is so attractive to researchers and practitioners alike. Indeed, in *Tourism Management*, there has been a discernible increase in the publication of mixed methods research since 2005.

The aim of this paper is to advocate the use by tourism researchers of mixed methods research (MMR) to address contemporary issues and challenges in the tourism industry. This paper will reveal that applied researchers can produce useful findings for industry practitioners if they use both qualitative and quantitative research. Using as an example an MMR-based study on the meaning of tranquillity to authorities, visitors and residents, our paper will show that the findings from this project that are of wide industry relevance and applicability could not have been produced by one research approach alone. Only a series of in-depth focus groups with representatives of authorities, community groups and local residents was able to yield the data on the meaning people attach to tranquillity. Such valuable insights fed into the household questionnaires and visitor onsite surveys subsequently used, and the resulting sets of data led to the creation of a planning tool for destination planners. We will thus argue that only the qualitative approach could deliver key findings in this research project, which would not have been completed without its incorporation into the methodological approach. Meanwhile the quantitative phases of the project offer statistical evidence to support the both the development of the planning tool and the direction of further research required. Combined together, we will show that the findings produced in this project have industry relevance, and that they can be used to improve practice.

2. Mixing methods and matching practice

[Ren et al. \(2010\)](#) argue that the challenge is for tourism researchers to adopt methodologies that reflect multiple positions, practices and insights. It is for this reason that a mixed methods approach is often viewed as the way to improve the validity and utility of findings, as well as to appeal to editors and reviewers, and practitioners. At the heart of MMR is pluralism, thus regardless of whether a qualitative or quantitative method dominates, its foundation is based on its 'central premise that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone' ([Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007](#) p.5). Hence, through the mixing of methods, research design, analyses, interpretation and data presentation ([Fielding, 2012](#)), the values of each approach are embraced with the result that qualitative data inform quantitative outputs and/or vice versa.

The pluralistic stance of MMR reflects the multiplicity of perspectives available to tourism researchers, and the approach might well appear obvious given the make-up of the industry that cuts across sectors. Tourism represents an increasingly interconnected world of enquiry that can be researched through various ways, from numerous starting points, leading to diverse outcomes hence it is 'characterised by equifinality and multifinality' ([Burke Johnson, 2015](#), p. 700). Taking this perspective, the use of one research method 'is not adequate for answering complex questions'. Instead, opportunities to expand and deepen our knowledge are realised by coming 'at things differently' ([Hesse-Biber & Burke Johnson, 2013](#) p. 103), through MMR that crosses the so-called methodological divide between qualitative and quantitative paradigms. The convergence of data on a topic leads to increased confidence in results and ultimately in the ability to overcome the weaknesses of any single method ([Campbell & Fiske, 1959](#); [Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007](#); [Dandekar, 2005](#)) for which triangulation is a 'core justificatory principle underpinning mixed method approaches' ([Torrance, 2012](#), p. 113).

There are also limitations to MMR. The transformation of

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