

Carlsen, J (2003) Australian University Tourism Education and Research in Griffin, T and R. Harris (eds.) "Current Research, Future Strategies: Bridging Uncertainty. Proceedings of the 9th Annual Conference of the Asia Pacific Tourism Association. UTS:Sydney.

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Australian University Tourism Education and Research

Full Paper

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Australian University Tourism Education and Research

Abstract

Since the seminal paper on tourism education in Australia by the late Bill Faulkner, Phil Pearce, Robin Shaw and Betty Weiler in 1994, there has been limited academic attention given to the state of Australian university tourism education and research. This may be explained by the pressure on Australian tourism universities to increase their output of teaching and research in response to the emergence of new topics (sustainable tourism, ecotourism, events tourism etc) as well as the establishment of new means of funding tourism research in the 1990s. At the micro-level, academic demands and workloads have determined that tourism education and research opportunities are pursued in a pragmatic and immediate sense, with little time or thought given to either the current disciplinary themes or longer term challenges such as educational market forces and limited human resources.

This paper reviews tourism and hospitality education and research over the last decade in Australia with the objective of identifying dominant disciplines and issues that may have emerged. Previous literature on the topic of tourism education and research will be reviewed and key themes and issues identified. A quantitative analysis of the main disciplinary themes is conducted using the CD-ROM publication titled 'Ten Years of Tourism Research' which includes over 350 refereed papers from the Council of Australian University Tourism and Hospitality Education (CAUTHE) conferences held in Australia since 1993. Based on this review and analysis, important themes and issues will

be identified and discussed and the immediate and longer-term implications for Australian university tourism education will be explored.

Introduction

Since the seminal paper on tourism research in Australia by the late Bill Faulkner, Phillip Pearce, Robin Shaw and Betty Weiler (Faulkner *et.al.* 1994), there has been limited academic attention given to the trends in tourism studies in Australia (Wells, 1996; Sofield and Lee, 1998; McKercher 2000). This may be explained by the pressure on Australian tourism universities to increase their output of research in response to the emergence of new themes (sustainable tourism, ecotourism, events tourism etc) as well as the establishment of new means of funding tourism education in the 1990s. At the micro-level, academic demands and workloads have determined that tourism education opportunities are pursued in a pragmatic and immediate sense, with little time or thought given to the strategic and long-term direction.

In their seminal paper, Faulkner *et al* (1994) suggested that there are four indicators of growth in tourism research by Australian tourism academics, being:

1. The study of tourism in Academic Institutions
2. National tourism research workshops and conferences
3. Australian tourism publications
4. International connections and networks.

Each of these indicators are valid, but limited in the sense that they do not explore the forces driving tourism education nor could they accommodate the major changes in the nature of tourism education and the significant debates that emerged in the 1990s. These major changes had a bearing on both the quantum of tourism research and the foci of research efforts. Changes in the quantum have resulted from the funding programs that

the federal Department of Education have imposed on universities using the equivalent full-time student units (EFTSU) funding mechanism and Research Activity Index (RAI) as an output-driven measure of the research performance of individuals and institutions. A second factor that has increased the quantum of tourism research in Australia in the 1990s is the establishment of Co-operative Research Centres, which has greatly increased the inputs (in cash, in-kind and collaborative linkages) and the postgraduate enrolments (particularly at doctoral level) in tourism. Thus, tourism education in the 1990s has expanded in response to input-driven and output-led forces, both of which have a major bearing on the indicators identified above.

All but a few Australian universities offer tourism programs and the tourism education community as embodied in the Council of Australian University Tourism and Hospitality Education (CAUTHE) has evolved from its inchoate state in 1992 to fully established network in 2002. Note the term 'education' in the title of CAUTHE is used in a broad sense to describe both teaching and research, and that convention which was established by Faulkner et al in 1994 is followed in this paper.

At the 1998 conference of CAUTHE with the theme of "Progress in Tourism and Hospitality Research", Faulkner (1998) posed a number of questions relating to the relationship between tourism and hospitality education, the merits of a multi-disciplinary approach, key theoretical perspectives, growth in publications and barriers to research collaboration which set the scene for the conference. Sadly, these questions remain unanswered, and there has been no real progress in the debate since 1998. This paper

employs these indicators of progress in tourism education used by Faulkner et al (1994) to illustrate the status of Australian tourism university education and research.

The study of tourism in Australian universities

There have been a number of authors that have traced the historical emergence of tourism as a field of study commencing with Jafari's identification of the four platforms of tourism studies (Jafari 1988 and 1990). It is not surprising that scholars from the USA lead the way in thinking about the trends in tourism studies, given that they were among the first in the western world to establish tourism studies at tertiary level in the 1960s at Michigan State University (Jafari 1998). University tourism education in Australia, came about a decade later initially in institutes of technology and agricultural colleges in Victoria and NSW. These courses included hospitality and tourism and there was only four or five such programs by the mid 1980s. In response to tourism growth in the mid 1980s and the hosting of a number of significant international events (including the Americas Cup in Fremantle and the World Expo in Brisbane), governments, industry and universities began to establish tourism and hospitality programs in anticipation of future growth in international tourism. By 1989 some 15 undergraduate programs were offered and by 1993 there were 22 universities offering 26 degrees in tourism and hospitality (Bushell and Robertson 1993). McKercher (2000) found that there were 27 universities offering tourism or hospitality programs, fully more than two-thirds of all Australian universities and Sofield and Lee (1998) found that there were 29 universities offering 55 programs in tourism in Australia by the late 1990s. The relative mix of tourism and hospitality programs has also changed, from parity in 1989 (10 tourism and 8 hospitality

programs) to a predominance of tourism programs in 1995 (18 tourism and 9 hospitality) (Wells 1996). The orientation of tourism and hospitality programs has also evolved from wider arts, social sciences or leisure orientation to a consolidated business degree, although the actual proportion of tourism content does vary significantly (Wells 1996, Sofield and Lee 1998)

Tourism as a Discipline

There are a number of issues that emerge from the limited literature on tourism and hospitality university education. Firstly, there is the international debate over the disciplinary basis of tourism education. The discourse between Tribe (1997) and Leiper (2000) is pertinent here, together with contributions from the UK (Morrison 2001) and early work in the USA (Jafari 1988, Jafari and Brent Ritchie 1981). Secondly, there is some analytical work on the subjects and content of tourism and hospitality undergraduate and postgraduate programs (Wells, 1996; Sofield and Lee, 1998). The relationship between tourism and hospitality education is a subset of this analytical work (Faulkner 1998). Finally, there is some conjecture as to the future of tourism education in Australia (McKercher 2000) and the challenges of the 1990s they are still confronting tourism scholars in the 21st century (Faulkner et al 1994). The first of these issues, tourism as a discipline is discussed below as background to the thematic findings presented in this paper.

The question of whether or not tourism constitutes a discrete disciplinary field of study is mired in a range of issues in epistemology and definitions. Tribe (1997) presents an argument as to why tourism could not be described as a discipline based on other authors (mainly Hirst 1974) criteria for defining knowledge forms, or disciplines. Tribe argues that tourism does not display the concepts, networks or theoretical underpinnings that are present in the recognized disciplines such as mathematics, physical sciences and philosophy, for example. However, Leiper (2000) in his rejoinder to Tribe suggests that the 'is it or isn't it' approach causes Tribe to overlook the fact that tourism education is evolving and draw upon several disciplines as the field continues to expand and develop. Leiper (2000) cites a number of unique concepts that are tourism-specific, but avoids the dichotomous choice question about tourism as a discipline on the basis that 'black and white positions (yes/no) can miss the truth and mislead' (2000: 808). Leiper describes tourism as an emerging discipline, as indeed, most disciplines must have emerged from social phenomena over the centuries. Indeed, Tribe's modification of the early 'spoke and wheel' model of tourism studies (Jafar and Brent Ritchie 1981) is evidence that thinking about the phenomenon tourism continues to evolve. Both authors concur that tourism is multi- and inter-disciplinary. However, the absence of truly multidisciplinary educational programs in Australian universities indicates that there is still a gap between how we perceive tourism education, and how practice it.

Further evidence of how tourism as a field of study has evolved is provided by Jafari (1988) who has identified four 'platforms' which have historically emerged in the 20th century, each one building upon (or in reaction to) the previous one. The first of these

four platforms is the Advocacy platform, which emphasises the economic benefits of tourism. This platform characterises the planning, policy and research literature when tourism is inchoate, and is occupied by private entities and public agencies regarding tourism as a “quick fix” for socio-economic problems. Initial, unqualified promotion of the economic benefits of tourism development led to a reactive platform, occupied by those who directly challenge Advocacy. This Cautionary platform, either directly challenges the Advocacy claims or seeks to expose the undesirable impacts of tourism. This Cautionary platform is occupied by the academic community (especially social scientists), public agencies and the media. This polarised debate on the impacts of tourism gave rise to consideration of alternative forms of tourism. Scholars occupying the third Adaptancy platform favoured the study of those forms of tourism that are responsive to environmental and socio-economic factors and have subsequently been described internationally as alternative tourism and in Australia as sustainable tourism, ecotourism and community-based tourism. The final platform of tourism development research recognised that the pervasive nature of tourism worldwide required a far more rigorous and enlightened approach than any of the three previous platforms could offer. The Knowledge-base platform emerged from this process with the goal of “formation of a scientific body of knowledge on tourism” (Jafari 1988:7). The next platform of tourism studies is yet to emerge, but will no doubt be based on the concepts, networks and body of knowledge that is continuing to develop.

Morrison (2001) reflects on tourism and hospitality research and the need for interdisciplinary ‘bridges’ to build the theoretical framework for tourism knowledge.

This will require a revision of the lexicon of tourism and hospitality education to identify common labels, concepts and terminology both within the field and between hospitality and tourism and the other fields of study. Whilst not conceding that tourism and hospitality does not have its own distinct terms and concepts to offer, this approach does link to the question of the epistemology of tourism raised by Tribe and Leiper. Tourism and hospitality research should not be constrained the educational and philosophical differences, but seek instead to explore new ways of understanding from the researchers respective positions. Hensher (Bureau of Tourism Research 1993) found a strong common ground between tourism research and transport research, particularly in appropriate methods for researching travel and destination choice. Faulkner (1998) found an affinity between tourism and geography, given that the focus of modern geography includes social, environmental and economic dimensions in addition to the common spatial aspects of geography and tourism. Faulkner also points to the range of tourism textbooks to highlight how tourism relies upon contributions from all of the social sciences.

Recognising the absence of any data specific to the disciplinary themes in tourism education the following section describes an initial investigation of themes that have emerged in Australia in 1990s, followed by a discussion of the main issues that still confront tourism education in the years ahead.

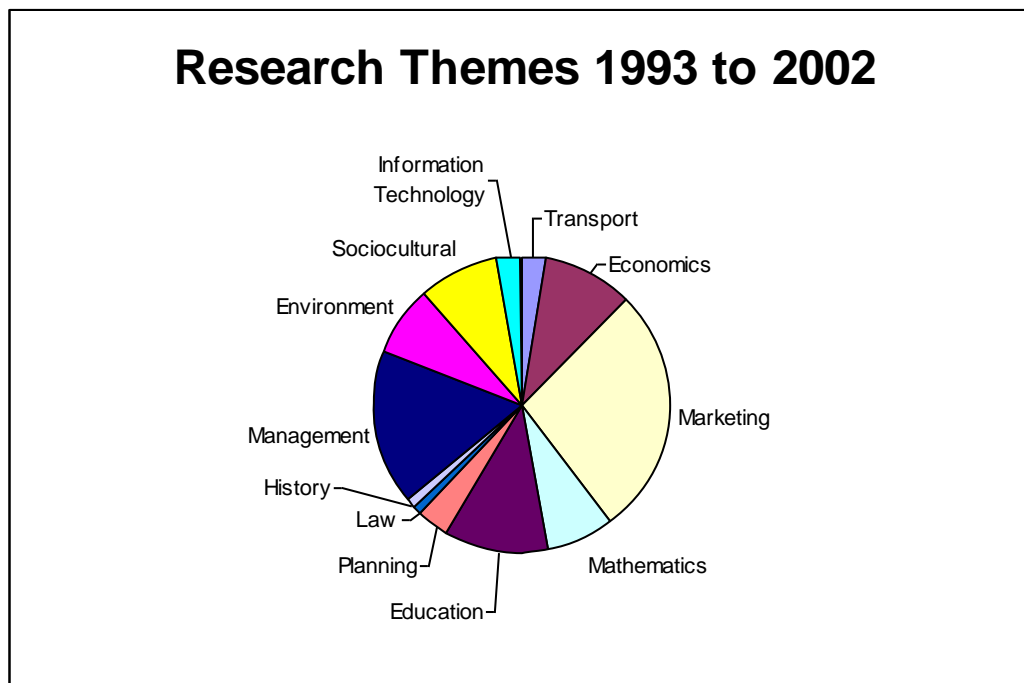
Findings

Detailed analysis of disciplinary themes of CAUTHE conference papers (full papers) presented since 1993 provides insights into the dominant and emerging areas of tourism education in Australia. Using the compilation of papers on the CD-ROM *Ten Years of Tourism Research: CAUTHE conference proceedings from 1993 to 2002* (Carlsen 2002) to identify the main discipline areas of each paper using a pre-determined list of disciplines. The analysis indicates that a range of disciplinary perspectives are employed in tourism education: Transport; Economics; Marketing; Mathematics; Education; Planning; Law; History; Management; Environmental Studies; Sociocultural studies and Information technology.

The findings (figure 1) show that there has been a predominance of papers in marketing, which includes all aspects of consumer and product research in tourism and hospitality. Management was also a major theme, including geography, business and destination management, natural area management as well as papers on human resource management. It should be noted that the classification and analysis will inevitably include some overlap of themes, but in all papers the main themes as well as secondary themes were identified. A number of papers had more than one disciplinary theme, in which case both themes were included in the analysis. Common overlapping themes were marketing/management, marketing/mathematics and management/environment. The membership of CAUTHE also has had a bearing on the findings and the theme of tourism education was third highest, reflecting the high number of tourism educators who attend

the annual conference. These three main themes of marketing, management and education are followed by a group that includes (in order) economics, sociocultural studies, environment and mathematics, which make up the middle-ranking group of themes. There is a third group of themes that occur less frequently, but remain important to the field of tourism studies, being (in order) planning, transport, information technology, history and law.

Figure 1- Research Themes 1993 to 2002



Source: Carlsen, J (2002) 'Ten Years of Tourism Research'. CAUTHE conference proceedings 1993 to 2002. CRC for sustainable tourism; Gold Coast.

Discussion

Whilst many of the research themes of ten years ago are still present today, some need to be revisited in light of the changing tourism environment. Previous themes have been

tourism demand and management, tourism planning and monitoring, tourism marketing and, more recently, the environmental and social impacts of tourism. As the scope of tourism and hospitality research became more diversified, new themes have emerged to reflect the broader economic, social and environmental forces at work in 1990s Australia, such as tourism and information technology, cultural tourism (including indigenous tourism), sustainable tourism and special interest tourism. Also underwriting this growth and diversity in research has been the establishment of Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs) in Reef and Rainforest and Sustainable Tourism. These CRCs have made a significant contribution to the research output of CAUTHE members and delegates as evidenced by the increase in papers published after 1995. Special Events also generated increasing research outputs in Australia in the 1990s (Hede, Jago and Deery 2002), resulting from mega events such as the Olympics. The review of special events research indicates four main themes: evaluation (economics); management; marketing and research. These themes, to some extent, duplicate the themes that are evident in the CAUTHE publications (and indeed include these publications), with the notable difference that marketing does not predominate in the same way. Hede et al (2002) conclude that there has emerged a considerable body of literature in special event research that, despite some gaps, provides a good basis future research.

The rapid expansion of tourism education and research programs in Australia has generated a number of potential problems, some of which were anticipated by Faulkner et al in 1994, which are discussed below. Firstly, the rapid growth in programs has not been matched by a growth in the availability of qualified university academics (McKercher

2000), with the result that both the teaching and research programs have suffered. Whilst there has been a significant increase in tourism academics with PhDs since the early 1980s (Hall 1991), there remains a shortage of senior Australian tourism academics as evidenced by the difficulty in filling tourism and hospitality positions. Secondly, compounding this problem is the lack of international competitiveness of Australian university salaries makes it difficult to recruit and retain leading international tourism scholars to fill the void.

Thirdly, the proliferation of courses at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level has generated an over-supply of places with the result that some courses are on the margins of viability. In an attempt to boost enrolments, many universities are targeting international students, which has had implications for both the demographic mix and academic quality, particularly at postgraduate level. In a pilot survey of CAUTHE member universities offering postgraduate courses in tourism, it was found that Masters programs faced declining proportions of Australian students (as low as 30%) and an increasing dependence on a limited number of international students to achieve viable course numbers. This has led to a fourth issue related to declining academic standards in university tourism education. Some universities indicated that the language and literacy problems inherent in the international student cohort was compromising academic standards.

The net result of the combination of these problems is that Australian universities will continue to experience a shortage of well-qualified staff and post-graduate students due to

the lack of incentives to pursue an academic career in tourism education. A related problem is that pressure on existing full-time academics to teach and conduct research will increase as courses contract, sessional staff are laid-off and funding declines. McKercher (2000) foresaw an uncertain future for tourism education in Australia, but the confluence of these problems - a shortage of Australian postgraduate students and qualified senior staff - indicates that the future is certain - tourism education in Australia will continue to be led by market forces and suffer from a lack of human resources to meet the increasing demand. In academic life, as in demographics, if a population is not naturally replacing itself (ie. from within) it will need to introduce more people from overseas to grow. This places tourism education at the mercy of international competitive forces, for both staff and students with the result that the strongest institutions will survive while the weakest will fall by the wayside.

Summary

Two issues are apparent from the discussion analysis of trends in Australian tourism education and research. Firstly there is a predominance of papers with a marketing theme with an emphasis on investigating tourism markets and products. This reflects the fact that tourism is market-led and that understanding the characteristics, needs, motivations, behaviour and opinions of tourists is not only of great academic interest, it is also a pre-requisite to success in the industry. Sound knowledge of the market is also the key to product development as many tourism scholars and tourism managers have come to recognise. Government at all levels is also continually funding major marketing campaigns designed to attract more tourism while at the same time funding the collection

of tourism data for monitoring of tourism trends. The emphasis on marketing of tourism by government and industry has influenced the nature of tourism education in Australian universities as they attempt to provide industry and government relevant research and appropriately qualified graduates.

The second issue to emerge from this analysis in the context of Faulkner's 1998 exploration of tourism and hospitality research, is the absence of inter and multi-disciplinary themes in Australia tourism education. While it was evident that some inter- and multi-disciplinary study has occurred in the areas of marketing and management for example, there is little evidence of multi-disciplinary approaches as recommended by Faulkner (1998), despite increased rhetorical reference to economic, ecological and social sustainability and the need for a triple bottom line approach to tourism education. If tourism education is to progress beyond a pre-occupation with markets and products and develop a more holistic approach to understanding tourism as it unfolds in the 21st century, much more multi-disciplinary research is required. Australian universities and tourism scholars have to develop collaborative linkages across disciplinary and geographic boundaries in order for tourism education to progress in the future.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the work of René Baretje, Director of

Centre International Recherche's et d'Etudes Touristiques in France for his detailed analysis of the CAUTHE conference papers 1993 to 2002 and also the research assistance of Stephen Gale, Curtin University.

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