THE ECONOMY OF TOURISM SPACES: A MULTIPlicity OF

“CRITICAL TURNS”?

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INTRODUCTION

Two decades ago, Britton’s (1991) eloquently argued for a political economy approach in geographic examinations of tourism stressing that this would reinforce the theoretical underpinnings of the geography of tourism. Inspired by this mandate, several geographers have periodically argued for strengthening tourism’s conceptual ties to economic geography (Shaw and Williams 1994; Ioannides 1995; Milne 1996; Ioannides and Debbage 1998; Agarwal et al. 2000).

What triggered the recent impressive growth in geographers’ attention to the so-called economic geography of tourism has been the sub-discipline’s overall re-orientation toward the “critical and cultural turn” in tourist studies. Ateljevic (2000) points out that the aforementioned agenda for strengthening the ties of tourism to economic geography resulted in a “theoretically embedded new economic geography of tourism” (370) at precisely the time when the boundaries between economic, cultural, and other forms of tourism had begun to blur. The way forward, according to Ateljevic (2000: 371) was to adopt a “neo-Gramscian concept of negotiation between production and consumption processes, as each connected through reproduction.” Her argument was that a production-oriented or a consumption-oriented approach in isolation of each other was too limiting.

This chapter charts the direction the economic geography of tourism has taken since the late 1990s. Although several useful research directions are incorporated within this overall theme, because of space limitations we focus on just a handful of the issues that interest tourism geographers. Our principal argument is that while various “critical turns” in tourism strengthen geographers’ attention towards tourism from an economic geography standpoint, a serious downside of much of the “critical turn” orientation is that the agenda Britton so vehemently argued for has been watered down. Gibson (2009: 528) argues...
that the recent emphasis of tourism research on social and cultural issues marginalizes issues relating to “political economy, industrial structure or relations of production.”

Throughout the chapter, we emphasize tourism’s important role as an instrument of production and capital accumulation while acknowledging the notion that production and consumption are infused with culturally symbolic processes that are territorially embedded. On this we agree with Shaw and Williams’ (2004: 269) contention that while “material relationships do fundamentally mediate virtually all tourism experiences” it is also true that “the economy of signs and symbols is not reducible to the costs of labour, capital and other factors of production.” Thus, this chapter should not be perceived as an argument against the various “critical turns” in the geographies of tourism. Rather, it echoes Bianchi’s (2009: 498) unease that “the world of work and associated organization of production appears to be an increasingly marginal concern within ‘critical’ tourism scholarship at a time when it is arguably most needed.”

THE “CULTURAL TURN”: CULTURAL COMMODIFICATION AND THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

Although most researchers acknowledge the important role of the tourism industry in the experience economy, a universal definition of the cultural products industry remains elusive and highly contested. That said the commodification of consumption and the emergence of symbolic or cultural capital (Bayliss 2004, 2007; Featherstone 1991) clearly elevates the social-cultural dimension of tourism production and consumption. A significant turning point in the theoretical evolution of tourism studies was Urry’s (1990) The Tourist Gaze, which shifted attention towards the social and cultural relations of power in tourism. Ateljevic and Doorne (2003) built on this platform suggesting the consumption and production of tourist goods is a surrogate vehicle for analyzing human relations and representations of identity. A significant body of work has emerged (Aitchison 2001, 2006; Ateljevic et al 2007; Barnett 2005; Bell 2007; Crang 1997; Crouch 2000; Debbage and Ioannides 2004; Rojek 2000, 2007) offering a more nuanced appreciation of the cultural and social dimensions of the tourism production and consumption system. McNeill (2008: 394) contends that hotels highlight the complex social geographies of the city since they mirror “the contradictions and inequalities of modern consumer societies” and represent the reworking of
urbanized consumption spaces. If “you are what you buy” and “you are where you vacation” then the increased socio-cultural differentiation in the way in which tourism is produced and consumed becomes important to any destination’s success or failure. However, others warn against the unchallenged acceptance of the “cultural turn” (Meethan 2001) suggesting that the cultural practice of tourism as an arena where individuals create identities based on power and knowledge “exaggerates the opportunities for autonomy and self-actualization provided for by tourism consumption…” (Bianchi 2009: 495).

THE “MOBILITY TURN”: COMMODITY CHAINS AND THE TOURISM-TRANSPORT INTERFACE

In a recent review of the geographies of tourism, Hall and Page (2009: 6) highlighted the theoretical merits stemming from geographers’ involvement “in the development of concepts of mobility.” Much of the more economically-oriented research in the “mobility turn” in tourism geography focuses on the interplay between migration and tourism within the context of globalization with an emphasis on labour migration (Aitken and Hall 2000; Uriely 2001; Williams 2006, 2007), second homes (Hall and Muller 2004; Muller 2002, 2004) and the spatial behaviour of tourists in a given destination (Connell and Page 2008; Lau and McKercher 2007).

These differentiated mobilities of travel are explicitly connected to the mobility of capital, goods and commodities in tourism given the global-local nexus of much of the tourism system (Milne and Ateljevic 2001). Analyzing tourism as complex and geographically diverse commodity chains helps “unravel the power relations in tourism distribution channels” (Coles and Hall 2006: 291). Mosedale (2006; 2008) has attempted one of the most innovative applications of the global commodity chain theoretic. Specifically, he utilizes the commodity chain framework to illuminate the spatiality of production relationships by linking corporate headquarter locations to sites of production on the Caribbean island of St. Lucia (Mosedale 2006). Thus, it becomes possible to more explicitly model international business behaviours, avoiding a destination-based approach that constrains analysis to how local actors impact a destination. The commodity chain approach allows tourism geographers to ask new research questions such as: who can
participate in commodity chains and why; what and where are the barriers to entry for full participation and; how are these constructed (Mosedale 2008)?

In related research, Judd (2006) argues that commodity chains are ideally suited for identifying the organizational structure of the tourism industry and the relationships between inputs and outputs. He identifies experiences as the principal output of tourism, while the three significant inputs that manufacture this final product are: marketing and image agencies; place infrastructure; and tourism providers (e.g., tour operators, airlines, and hotels). Whereas gathering data to trace the commodity chain is a daunting task given various conceptual problems, Judd dismisses the notion that tourism is more complicated than any other sector. Rather, he contends that by treating tourism as a coherent system of production, it becomes possible to integrate tourism literature with broader discussions on globalization. Further, Judd contends that part of the problem is that current definitions of tourism are deficient since they view tourism as a system of consumption rather than production.

Although Judd de-emphasizes the reciprocal relationships between production and consumption, clearly the commodity chain framework better encapsulates the totality of tourism impact in time and space since it explicitly incorporates the effects at the origin coupled with the travel to and from destinations (Hall 2005). That said, given transport's fundamental role in linking tourist generating areas with destinations, it is surprising that so few mobility researchers investigate how transportation systems shape international and domestic tourist flows. This is changing with the advent of specialist texts focused on the global perspectives of transport and tourism (Hanlon 1999; Graham 2003; Graham et al. 2008; Page 2005). One area of interest includes analyzing how specific airline business models shape destination development patterns (Bieger and Wittmer, 2006; Papatheodorou and Lei, 2006). Others investigate how the regulatory environment of the international airline industry and airport-based infrastructural constraints influence tourist flows (Debbage 2000; 2002; 2005). Further, Debbage and Alkaabi (2008) suggest that airlines utilize market power to shape consumer demand and accessibility levels in major destinations like Dubai.

Conversely, only a few tourism researchers study the international impact of cruise ship tourism (Braun et al. 2002; Douglas and Douglas 2004; Dowling 2006; Jaakson 2004; Weaver 2005; and Wood 2000).
Cruise tourism is a curious form of mobility and transportation since ships are increasingly marketed not just as transportation modes but also as “floating resort destinations” competing directly with land-based resorts like Las Vegas and Orlando. Wood (2000: 352-3) argues that “if economic globalization means the increased mobility of capital and its spatial embeddedness, cruiseships represent the ultimate in globalization: physically mobile; massive chunks of multinational capital; capable of being ‘repositioned’ anywhere in the world at any time…” Terry (2009) provides an interesting perspective in an exploration of the dynamics leading to the proliferation of Filipino workers in the global cruise industry and discusses how these individuals find themselves in an exploitative labour environment.

**ACTOR NETWORK THEORY AND THE “RELATIONAL TURN”: IMPLICATIONS FOR TOURISM**

Responding to Judd’s (2006) position, d’Hauteserre (2006) believes actor network theory (ANT) is theoretically superior to commodity chains for disentangling the complexities of tourism as a production system. For her, the commodity chain framework unnecessarily prioritizes productionist relationships while ANT is best suited for understanding how production and consumption are mediated in creating tourism experiences.

Johanesson (2005) was one of the first tourism geographers to highlight the utility of ANT in an analysis of Iceland’s cultural heritage tourism. He argues that ANT’s focus on relational materiality and its ability to accommodate multiple relational orderings and diverse forms of spatialities into the analysis make it ideally suited for analyzing tourism’s economic and material aspects. According to Johanesson (2005: 139) “we cannot know if the tourists are more important in shaping the tourist place than the firms and local people promoting it or what role natural attractions play in the particular networks until we have traced the specific network practices and the relations out of which tourism emerges.” Additionally, Van Der Duim (2005) utilizes ANT to re-conceptualize tourism through “tourismscapes” to better understand human-spatial relations.

ANT constitutes part of a larger “relational turn” in economic geography placing its analytical focus “on the complex nexus of relations among actors and structures that effect dynamic changes in the spatial organization of economic activities” (Yeung 2005: 37). Given the complex tourism commodity chain, the
variegated institutional structures, and the multiplicity of individual interactions shaping the tourism experience, evidently relational economic geography has some application in this context. Yeung (2005) stresses that relational geography contributes to a better understanding of industrial districts, clusters and learning regions by focusing on key relational assets in local and regional development. Additionally he suggests that relational geography improves our comprehension of the global-local nexus, the differentiated production of organizational space and path dependency by focusing on relational embeddedness, actor network theory, and global production chains. Three basic components of the relational approach, namely contextuality, path-dependency, and contingency (Bathelt 2006), can be introduced to consider their effects on policy implementation relating to tourism. Examples include policies affecting the built environment (what gets built; in what form and function; where; for what purpose?) and the physical environment (what is preserved, re-shaped, or destroyed; for what purposes?)

Cynics suggest that a relational economic geography of tourism yields nothing more than descriptive categories reeking of anti-essentialism and, therefore, lacks explanatory power. Despite such caveats, relational geography offers tourism geographers a fruitful approach for negotiating the endless dilemma of whether tourism is forged by production or consumption processes. Ateljevic and Doorne (2004: 298) suggest a broader analysis of cultural circuits of tourism regarding “producers as ‘consumers’ and consumers as ‘producers’ who ‘feed off’ each other in endless cycles of re-consumption.” Such an approach might lend itself well to the broader theoretic provided by relational economic geography.

TOURISM INDUSTRY CLUSTERS, INNOVATION AND LABOUR: A RETURN TO WORK AND PRODUCTION?

Although the “critical turn” in tourist studies has elevated our understanding of the economic geography of tourism, a considerable body of work also exists, focusing on tourism from a more productionist perspective. Much of this research stresses the key role of inter-firm linkages, firm innovation, and labour’s impacts on destinations.
Tourism Clusters and Industrial Districts: Inter-Firm Linkages

Economic geographers have long studied why specific geographic clusters of interrelated firms - so-called Marshallian industrial districts - are more successful than others (Marshall 1920). However, until recently economic activities connected to tourism and resorts were not included in this powerful analytical framework. Hjalager (2000, 2010) was among the first to investigate whether tourism destination areas display similarities to “classic Marshallian districts,” asking if such “territorial environments [are] critical for the occurrence and dissemination of innovations” (5). According to Hjalager many features of an industrial district, including interdependence of firms, flexibility, cooperative competition, strategic alliance networks, and supportive public policies, apply to tourism destinations.

These issues have emerged in several analyses of tourism industry clusters in Australia (Jackson and Murphy 2002, 2006; Michael et al. 2007), China (Jackson 2006), Cuba (Miller et al. 2008), Italy (Bernini 2009), Turkey (Erkus-Ozturk 2009) and the UK (Novelli et al. 2006). Referring to tourism SMEs in the UK, Novelli et al. (2006) regard tourism clusters as the “co-location of complementary firms.” These firms “may not necessarily be involved in the same sector, but may benefit from pre-existing network membership and alliance dynamics” (1143). Additionally, Michael et al. (2007) have identified the key role of tourism-based “micro-clusters” in peripheral regions of Australia. They contend that micro-clusters flourish in smaller rural communities because of their small scale, level of specialization and peripheral isolation. The localized scale of tourism functions in peripheral regions helps local communities retain some control of the development process and, thereby, maintain some of the region's local character.

Innovation, Knowledge Spillovers, and Learning Regions

While a few large businesses dominate the tourism industry, small, independently-owned firms proliferate in most destinations. Understanding how tourism businesses (both large and small) conduct business and interact with tourists “is vital to establishing models and explanations of how they contribute to the local and national economy” (Page et al. 1999: 454). That said small tourism businesses have not traditionally been considered highly innovative since they are often operated by “lifestyle entrepreneurs,” tending to
offer low wage rates and few professional development training opportunities. Typically, these operations are plagued by high staff turnover rates and seasonality and a lack of business capital and skills (Shaw and Williams 1998; Hjalager 2002). Ioannides and Petersen (2003) show that in destinations where there is limited competition many SME operators are “gap” fillers who respond to the needs of the market by imitating the products already on offer. Only when competition increases, making it difficult for these operators to survive, do some operators innovate. Shaw and Williams (2004; 2009) argue that several key innovations including the development of ecotourism, the impact of the internet in tandem with e-tourism marketing, and the business model of low cost airlines are a result of Schumpeterian-style ‘disruptive competition.’

Hjalager (2002) contends that, given the proclivity for small business development, innovation in tourism does not stem from large-scale, conventional R&D subsidies or university-industry collaboration. Rather, tourism innovation is an expected outgrowth from the transfer of knowledge through various filters (trading, technology, infrastructure, and regulation). More recently, Sorensen (2007) analyzed the social innovation network geography of tourism through a study of firms in Malaga, Spain. Although the agglomeration and industry cluster literature presupposes that proximity facilitates the transfer of tacit knowledge since it is theoretically embedded in locality (Maskell and Malmberg 1999), according to Sorensen, this does not play out in some destinations. He argues that local tourism social networks are dense though “loose” since the smaller locally-owned firms are more concerned with day-to-day tasks rather than building local network alliances. Conversely, Sorensen characterizes the non-local networks of the larger tourism firms as “sparse” but strong since they are culturally and economically proximate (similar information needs, firm cultures and production practices).

Shaw and Williams (2009) highlight the need to explicitly entrench discussions on innovation and the transfer of knowledge in the study of tourism to better comprehend the competitive nature of firms and destinations. From a geographical perspective, the focus is on a more complete conceptualization of tourism-based learning regions particularly those places where collective learning, knowledge transfer and inter-firm linkages facilitate a sustainable competitive advantage. In an analysis of tourist attractions in Cornwall, Weidenfeld et al. (2010: 621) found that the most common form of knowledge transfer “was
‘learning by observation/imitation’, followed by ‘labour mobility’, and ‘inter-firm exchanges’ through coordinated visits between attractions, tourism associations and exhibitions.” However, more empirical research is needed on the economic geography of tacit knowledge within tourism learning regions before arguing with certainty that such spillovers are triggered by conditions of spatial proximity. Hall and Williams (2008) suggest one fruitful avenue of research is to better integrate an analysis of regional innovation systems in tourism with the resort cycle model, cultural and museum districts, and the clustering of hotels in downtown and suburban nodes.

**New Directions: Tourism Labour Geography**

While tourism entrepreneurship, innovation, inter-firm networks, and tourism’s interrelationship to learning regions periodically attract the attention of geographers leading to valuable theoretical insights, another important dimension of the political economy of tourism is neglected (Baum 2007; Gibson 2009). We refer the reader to examinations of the geographies of work and workers in tourism. This is despite Britton (1991: 458) recognizing the necessity for geographic inquiry acknowledging the unusual characteristics of tourism workers as “simultaneously providers of labour services and part of the consumed product.” It is, according to him, imperative to understand that tourism workers cannot merely be examined in terms of the tangible products she/he offers. Rather, one must account for the attitudes and personal attributes of these workers since much of the visitor’s experience depends on these elements. Ultimately, Britton believed that comprehending the interlinkages of capital to labour was a fundamental cog toward a stronger understanding of the mechanisms governing the tourism production system.

To be sure there are geographic studies attempting to incorporate a “geographical agenda in relation to tourism labour markets” (Church and Frost 2004: 225). Lundmark (2006) explores the effect of seasonality in winter destinations on labourers’ migration patterns. Church and Frost (2004) utilize Sassen’s (1994) “global city thesis” to investigate London’s tourism labour market, specifically looking at the inequities arising when a growing number of tourism workers earn wages that cannot keep pace with the city’s excessive property prices. Gladstone and Fainstein (2004) examine how the regulatory regimes
of various localities create contingencies that signify varying conditions for hotel workers and, as we have already mentioned, Terry (2009) laments how legal decisions in American courts have led to the enhancement of exploitation of Filipino cruise ship workers on a global basis.

Nevertheless, Gibson (2009) suggests these studies fail to meet Britton’s initial agenda. Others, including Hall and Page (2009), and Bianchi (2009) repeat this sentiment. Hall and Page’s argument that tourism geographers do not actively critique neoliberalism explains why labour and specifically the inequities relating to this dimension are superficially treated in the economic geography of tourism. Further, Bianchi blames the inattention on the excessive zeal with which geographers have embraced the postmodernist “critical turn.” He believes that in an effort to avoid criticisms of a productionist bent in their work (Franklin and Crang 2001) the proponents of the “critical turn” are guilty of casting aside fundamental issues such as the material inequalities and conditions of tourism labour markets. The “critical turn” does not comprehensively analyze the market-based mechanisms behind the division of labour witnessed in tourism settings nor does it allow us to fully comprehend how tourism workers shape the geographies of their everyday life.

To reignite tourism geographers’ need to take a keener interest in labour-related issues from a political economy standpoint, we would like to highlight Andrew Herod’s (1994, 1997) notion that workers are not subservient to capital but, rather, have an active say in the way economic landscapes are formed. Herod believes all workers, regardless of status, wish to engineer an economic landscape that aids in their own “self-reproduction” (16) and that this can only occur in spaces where they have access to housing and transportation options they can afford. In other words, he contends that in any given society the workers create their own geographies in ways that allow them to sustain their livelihoods.

Few tourism researchers seem aware of Herod’s work on “labour geography” although Gladstone and Préau (2008) independently discuss how the gentrification of neighbourhoods surrounding New Orleans’ French Quarter has largely been an outgrowth of tourism workers’ actions. Tufts (1998; 2004; 2006) is one geographer with regular contributions relating to the labour geographies of tourism workers. In an investigation of the forces leading to uneven spatial development within Toronto during the city’s failed bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games, he recognized it was not merely the developers, neighbourhood
boards, and banks that influenced this process but also workers (including tourism workers) had their say (both collectively and individually) (Tufts 2004).

Herod himself has co-edited *The Dirty Work of Neoliberalism: Cleaners in the Global Economy* (Aguiar and Herod 2006), which explores the conditions for cleaners in various sectors (including hotels) resulting from the cost-saving practices of firms (e.g., through outsourcing) during this age of globalization and neoliberalism. A fundamental argument is that women (many of them immigrants) dominate low-tier jobs (such as cleaning). These women are active in the performance of reproductive tasks traditionally linked to the housewife’s unpaid household chores (e.g., cooking, cleaning, and making the beds).

Recognizing this reality, Tufts and Savage (2009: 945) recently suggested several research directions in labour geography overall, including the need for “unpacking the complex identities of workers and the way in which those identities simultaneously are shaped by and shape the economic and cultural landscape.” Specifically referring to women (and or immigrants) in tourism, one could ask questions such as: who are they; where do they come from; where do they go to next; how do they choose where and when to work based on the geographies of their everyday lives; how do their work schedules influence where they live and their mobility patterns? Some of this research directly relates to the analysis of the social relations of tourism production and consumption more commonplace to the “critical turn”, but, thus far, tourism geographers have not conducted much integrative analysis.

Subsequently, studies seeking to disentangle the geographies of tourism work and workers will go a long way towards reinvigorating Britton’s resolve that tourism geographers must embrace a political economy approach. Certainly, these will allow us to move beyond one of the serious shortcomings of the “critical turn,” namely its short-sightedness when it comes to understanding the market based mechanisms that drive much of tourism development.
CONCLUSION: ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHIES OF TOURISM

Hall and Page (2009) suggest no one paradigmatic approach exists regarding the geography of tourism. They prefer the phrase “geographies of tourism” to capture the proliferation of new theoretical perspectives and research foci that have emerged in recent years. We use the term “economic geographies of tourism” in much the same spirit. Although, we sympathize with those arguing that the “world of work and production” in tourism has been neglected of late (Bianchi 2009; Gibson 2009; Judd 2006), this chapter should not be interpreted as a form of methodological imperialism or a hegemonic claim for one particular theoretical perspective over another. Instead, it is important to celebrate the chaos of the different “turns” mirroring an intellectual growth and more complex maturation process in the economic geographies of tourism.
REFERENCES


