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Life Begins at 40

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Tourism Education

Life Begins at 40

David Airey

It is difficult to put a precise date on the start of tourism education but, as the author has already commented (Airey 2005b: 13), it was during the 1960s that "a number of key changes in tourism [itself], in education and in society more generally," led to the emergence of tourism "both as a clear area of study in its own right and as a subject for study to diploma and degree level and for research." It was during that decade that many of the early tourism programmes began. They are now celebrating their 40th anniversaries. At this milestone it is interesting to reflect on the extent to which tourism education has reached the stage of maturity associated with 40 years. The purpose of this paper is to make this reflection and, in doing so, to explore the ways in which tourism has emerged and changed and, indeed, has matured. It also emphasizes that the development has been neither linear nor uni-dimensional. One of the fascinations has certainly been the ways and extent to which tourism as a field of study has changed and indeed almost reinvented itself within changing contexts.

Jafar Jafari identified the journey of tourism studies across four platform phases as we summarized (Tribe and Airey, 2007):

> *The first phase, the advocacy platform—was dominated by economists. The cautionary platform evolved in the 1970s and emphasised the negative as well as positive impacts of tourism—particularly on the environmental front. The adaptancy platform, which became popular in the 1980s, turned its attention to alternatives to mass tourism. The fourth platform—the knowledge platform […] sees tourism as a more mature study and offers a more comprehensive understanding […]*

Adapting the idea of four platforms, this paper explores the changes at two overlapping levels. The first are the changes in what John Tribe (1997: 647) has described as a "field of study." These can be captured by a consideration of changes in knowledge, the curriculum, and approaches to research. The second are in the preoccupations of those who have been writing about tourism education per se. The paper focuses mainly on tourism degree level studies and above. This is not to underestimate the importance of tourism education at other levels. Indeed the overwhelming majority of tourism students are studying at below degree level (in the United Kingdom about 80% of the 45,000 or so students, Airey, 2005c: 273). But it is really a reflection of the fact that the changes, which are the concern of this paper, have been more clearly articulated and observed and have had their most immediate and developed expression in higher education.

A number of authors have commented on the development of education for tourism. The paper makes use of a range of these sources. For education it draws partly on the first book on tourism education produced in 2005, *An International Handbook on Tourism Education* (Airey and Tribe) as well as on the author's own experience of tourism education in various settings over more than 35 years. To this extent it has both a personal and a geographical bias. But while the precise patterns might vary from country to country, the underlying messages have a broader resonance, which finds echoes in other contexts, including in other new subject areas that, like tourism, have grown out of practice.

Four Stages of Development

J. Jafari's four platforms (Tribe and Airey, 2007) take the motives of the proponents as a key rationale—hence advocacy, cautionary, adaptancy, and it is not until the final platform, knowledge, that they arrive at a broader comment on the state of tourism as a field of study. The four stages identified in this paper in fact reach a similar point (at least at their third stage) and indeed have a similar starting point, but they are more concerned with the evolution of the state of knowledge and research about tourism, which in turn provides the basis for understanding the changes in tourism education. The starting point is referred to here as the "Industrial Stage" and, in line with J. Jafari's first platform, is dominated by economists. For educationists in tourism, this was a period of estimating the statistics of programmes, students, and planning for growth. It then leads into a "Fragmented Stage" when other disciplines begin to make their mark on tourism. In education, that was the period dominated by debates and uncertainty about the content of the curriculum and accompanying fragmentation. The next stage is referred to here as the "Benchmark Stage," which takes its title from the exercise in the United Kingdom (UK) to capture the essential contents of subjects for degree level studies, including tourism. This, for the first time, produced a broad codification of what it means to study tourism and broadly related to J. Jafari's "knowledge platform." However, it has not led to universal agreement about the curriculum. Rather, it has been followed by a change in the nature of the debate about the curriculum and in the range of issues being explored in the literature such that the concerns of tourism education are now joining those of the more mainstream concerns of education for the social sciences. To the extent that there has been this broadening into the more main-

stream issues, it is referred to as the "Mature Stage." But whether tourism has yet reached maturity, in the sense that it is certain of its territory, is still open to question.

Of course, as in all attempts to classify developments over time, the identification of stages is artificial. There are no unequivocal breakpoints. Stages run into and through each other and indeed there are elements, for example, of the first stage still continuing in the final stage. The stages are purely artificial and in many ways more properly should be seen as building on each other. However, they do serve as a way of capturing what has been happening, which in this case is the emergence of a subject of study out of a rapidly growing field of practice. Over the 40 or so years, those involved with tourism education have taken it from a small, highly vocational and business dominated field of study to one which now has joined other more established fields of enquiry with its own body of literature, community of scholars, curriculum coverage and, most importantly for this paper, with the same concerns and questions as more established fields. In this last stage, tourism education has joined the academic community at large and it is now less concerned with establishing itself and its curriculum and more with addressing the questions and puzzles that occupy social sciences in general. In this sense it has matured at the age of 40.

The Industrial Stage

The tourism programmes of the 1960s and 1970s were highly vocational in aim and content, highly restricted in the knowledge base on which they could draw, and highly based on economics and business studies (Airey, 2005b: 13-24). There are a number of fairly obvious and interrelated explanations for this.

As far as vocationalism is concerned, the introduction of the first programmes was justified on the basis that they were designed to address the needs of a burgeoning tourism sector that was predicted to show strong growth. The resulting degree programmes were highly vocational, with close links with industry and employers and with a focus on practice and operation of the industry. As noted earlier by the author (Airey, 1995: 4-8), the growth of tourism as an activity, the expansion of further and higher education, as well as an increased recognition and respectability of vocational education provided a fairly potent set of influences that encouraged what would now be called "educational entrepreneurs" to launch the first tourism programmes. These sought to understand, explain, and prepare prospective employees for the tourism sector. In the words of one of the pioneers, John Burkart[1], the courses were designed to leave the students "surprise free" about what they would find in employment. These origins are still reflected in the aims, methods, content, and location (Airey, 2005c: 271-282; Stuart-Hoyle, 2003: 49-74; Airey and Johnson, 1999: 233) of many of the existing programmes, which include, for example, industry placements, practical field visits, and case studies with a strong business management orientation.

Such strong vocational and practical orientation clearly was important in providing a justification for the development of tourism studies. This was true both for the students and institutional managers. For the students the programmes emphasized their employment prospects. For example, in our study of tourism degree programmes (Airey and Johnson, 1999: 233) we point to the fact that "Career Opportunities" and "Employment/Employers Links/Work" are the top aims of tourism programmes as presented in the course catalogues. But it was important also within institutions that those developing the programmes could provide a rationale for the creation of a new and, at the time, seemingly esoteric or even frivolous area of study (Airey, 2005a: 5-15). A justification based on student recruitment and hence additional income was attractive to institutional managers. In the UK that was particularly true at a time when the funding regime for higher education institutions was changing to one based on funds being linked directly to student recruitment, rather than government grants, and at a time when higher education was being provided with greater freedoms to determine their own course offerings in a competitive market place (Airey, 1995: 8-9). Maureen Ayikoru's (2007) work has provided a broader context to this vocational and managerial orientation, suggesting that it has been given strong and lasting impetus by the dominant discursive ideologies in England within which such education is provided and developed. Her analysis points to the extent to which there developed a "common sense" view of tourism higher education "as a vocational field of study, underpinned by a business management framework," excluding other approaches (Ayikoru, 2007: ii).

But the orientation was also linked to the state of tourism knowledge at the time. J. Tribe's work (1997: 628-657) provides a basis for understanding that. Drawing on the work of Michael Gibbons's team (1994, cited in Tribe, 1997: 651), he makes a distinction between what he calls "extra disciplinary knowledge" on the one hand and "disciplinary" knowledge on the other. He describes the former as emanating from outside academia, from "industry, government, think-tanks, interest groups, research institutes and consultancies" (Tribe 1999: 103), the latter from academic disciplines. As a new field of study emerging from a growing industry it is not surprising that much of the early work relied on such extra disciplinary knowledge. As the author has noted (Airey 2002: 15), the sheer importance of this type of knowledge can readily be seen in the early writings about tourism. For example, the very comprehensive reference list for one of the early and influential textbooks (Burkart and Medlik, 1974) is dominated by government and other official reports and studies. The fact that these are very much concerned with economic, business, and statistical information provides an indication of the interests of those producing such knowledge. This is also shown in the more disciplinary-based studies of the time, reflecting J. Jafari's advocacy platform, which focused on economic impact studies (see for example Archer, 1977). An analysis of doctoral dissertations in the USA as late as 1988 found the largest contributions from the field of economics (Jafari and Aaser, 1988: 407-429).

This fairly narrow focus of tourism knowledge and studies finds expression in the work of those exploring tourism education, by their concentration on measurement, profiles, and explanations of key dimensions and on providing information and often encouragement to develop tourism programmes. This work also links closely with J. Jafari's advocacy. Slavoj Medlik's (1965) and Malcolm Lawson's (1974) studies of Western Europe, for example, provide accounts of the scale and nature of the provision being made at the time, while others give updates on dimensions of programmes, students, teachers etc. (Airey, 1979: 13-15; Airey and Middleton, 1979: 61-68; Cooper and Westlake, 1989: 69-73). These represent the beginnings of a fairly continuous stream of outputs seeking to document the scale of provision (see for example Cooper *et al*., 1992: 234-247; Airey *et al*., 1993: 7-18) up to the most recent in the UK, from Andreas Walmsley (2007).

The Fragmented Stage

Uncertainty about the curriculum has given tourism education an enduring subject for debate almost from its very beginnings. Publications through the 1980s and 1990s bear witness to this. These include the special issue of the *Annals of Tourism Research* (1981) devoted to tourism education, in which six of the eight papers deal with the curriculum. Reviewing the development from the viewpoint of the new century, J. Tribe (2005: 26-27) confirms this preoccupation with the curriculum. From 1974 to 2001, of the 301 papers he identified as belonging to tourism education, some 86% focused on the curriculum, with almost half of these providing critical reviews.

The background to such uncertainties about the curriculum lies in the growth in the scale of provision and the associated development of knowledge about tourism. One outcome of the popularity of tourism programmes in terms of student recruitment, particularly when other subject areas showed much less buoyancy, was that teachers were attracted into tourism from a range of other subject areas, bringing with them a wealth of different disciplinary and methodological approaches and associated knowledge. This had obvious implications for curriculum possibilities for a subject that had its origins in vocational needs and "extradisciplinary" knowledge. It is not surprising that it created tensions among the parties with an interest in the curriculum, not only between different subject areas that sought to find space for their work, but also between those who took a strictly vocationalist view of the curriculum and those who favoured a more liberal and reflective approach. These tensions found expression in a number of attempts to define a core curriculum for tourism (CNAA, 1993: 30-33; Holloway, 1995: 1-3) to avoid, as Chris Cooper, Robert Scales, and John Westlake (1992: 235) suggested, tourism programmes simply taking the character of the particular expertise of the faculty and in order the give the subject a credible and identifiable focus.

J. Tribe's (2002: 342) analysis provides a useful way of capturing the tensions and understanding the developments of the curriculum. He depicted the curriculum along two axes, one representing the different ends from liberal to vocational and the other representing the different modes of study from action to reflection. In his explanation, tourism education began in the quadrant of the curriculum space bounded by vocational ends and action modes. The early presence of professional practice placements as parts of tourism programmes provides an illustration. Later, as the knowledge base has broadened and particularly as disciplinary knowledge has grown, it has become possible for tourism programmes to extend into the more liberal and reflective areas, which have traditionally been more typical of higher education. This goes a long way to explain the preoccupation with the curriculum by those interested in tourism education. Works by several authors provide examples in their examination of the relationship between tourism education and the tourism industry (Cooper and Shepherd, 1997: 35-48), the role of stakeholders in tourism education (Cooper and Westlake, 1998: 93-100), competitive approaches to curriculum design (Smith and Cooper, 2000: 90-95), and curriculum planning (Cooper, 2002: 19-39). J. Tribe (2000a: 442-448) explores different methodological paradigms for researching into the curriculum.

Une classe attentive (cours de R. Legendre).
Photo : Robin Edgar

Partly, the obsession with the curriculum represents a contest between the different subjects and interests that seek space in the curriculum territory, partly it represents differences in views about the modes and ends of the curriculum, and partly it represents sheer uncertainty about what the curriculum should contain when the possibilities have been expanding so rapidly. This, in turn, has contributed to a fragmentation at least in parts of the provision. In many ways the vocational orientation provided something of a stabilizing force for the majority of programmes. The appeal of vocational education in terms of student recruitment meant that many programmes continued to occupy similar territories, which kept a focus on business, management, and vocation. Table 1 provides an example of an outline of a typical undergraduate tourism programme.

Table 1

Tourism Programme – BA (Honours) Tourism

Year 1
Introduction to tourism; Tourism environments; Tourism economics; People, work and tourism; Accounting and finance; Information; Residential field trip

Year 2
Economics and finance of tourism operations; Human resource management; Tourism marketing; Law related to tourism; Administration of tourism; Assessment of tourism resources; Research methods; Residential field trip

Year 3
Industrial placement

Year 4
Tourists and destinations; Business and tourism; Options; Dissertation

Source: Her Majesty's Inspectorate (1992: 27).

This type of programme represents J. Tribe's so-called business field (1997: 653-654), which "has some coherence and structure and a framework of theories and concepts." But, beyond this, he found no unifying element but rather "bits of atomized knowledge [emanating] from the disciplines themselves." In other words, there was a fragmentation between the business and non-business oriented tourism programmes and within the non-business programmes a diversity of approaches reflecting the burgeoning knowledge base and the inevitable contests over the curriculum.

The Benchmark Stage

In many ways, at least as far as the UK is concerned, the first and very lengthy period of debate about the curriculum was brought to a close with the publication, by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA, 2000: 1-21), of the *Subject Benchmark Statement for Hospitality, Leisure, Sport, and Tourism*. It was one of a series of such statements, which were the outcomes of attempts by the "academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of programmes in a specific subject" (QAA, 2000: 1). For tourism, this was the first such explicit attempt and the fact that it was conducted under the auspices of the national body charged with the oversight of quality assurance provided it with status, although it still left plenty of questions and areas for doubt, as set out by David Botterill and John Tribe (2000: 1-10). However, the credibility of the statement was enhanced by its development being based on a comprehensive consultation with the academic community who were able to reach broad consensus about what it meant to study tourism at degree level. The key headings of the statement are provided in table 2.

Table 2

QAA Subject Benchmark for Tourism

Concepts and characteristics of tourism as an area of study
Products, structure and interactions in the tourism industry
Role of tourism in communities and environments
Nature and characteristics of tourists

Source: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2000: 15-16).

The headings suggest that tourism in 2000 went well beyond the study of the industry and included the role of tourism in communities and environments, the nature and characteristics of tourists themselves as well as tourism as an area of study. This can be seen in the wide range of content of the current programme provision that includes for example "Ethical issues in tourism," "Sustainable tourism," "Tourism and the Third World," "Tourism, culture and society," Cultural anthropology and tourism," and "Photography, travel and visual culture."[2] In other words the consensus is that tourism programmes are not just about providing education to meet the immediate operational requirements of the tourism sector, but also that they take both a more philosophical and longer term perspective. To this extent, tourism programmes are providing the perspectives traditionally offered by the academic world of not simply reflecting the world as it is, but also providing the basis to question that world. However, notwithstanding such broadening, in reality, as we reported (Airey and Johnson, 1999: 232), most of the programmes still nevertheless retained their business core. Indeed business and management studies for most remained the dominant part of the curriculum. J. Tribe's two fields (1997) were still in existence even though the biggest of the fields was broadening out into wider territory.

The Mature Stage?

The development of tourism education up to this point has been marked above all by its emergence from a growing field of practice and by debates about the curriculum, as amply reflected by the preoccupations of those writing about tourism education. To the extent that these have been characterized by uncertainties—about the size of the provision, about the balance between practice and theory, and, above all, about the curriculum—then tourism education can be described as immature. However, recent work on tourism education suggests that the existing interests are being joined by new areas of enquiry, by engagement with wider debates and self-criticism, and by a more mature consideration of the role of tourism education. Together these suggest that there may now be a new stage developing; one in which the concerns of tourism are less about justifying or questioning its existence and more about wider debates more akin to the social sciences generally. Tourism may be moving into a mature stage.

One of the new areas of enquiry relates to teaching. J. Tribe (:2005: 27) noted just 3% of tourism education papers up to 2001 devoted to teaching, learning, and assessment, compared with 86% on the curriculum. That is in marked contrast to the literature in the general field of education (Winne and Marx, 1977: 668-678), as noted by Dimitrios Stergiou (2005: 285), who draws attention to the fact that most educational researchers subscribe to the assertion that research on education depends most heavily on research about teaching for its advancement. As Dimitrios Stergiou, David Airey, and Michael Riley note (2002: 150): "The pre-occupation of authors and researchers in what is and ought to be taught—the curriculum—has tended to drive out issues related to the conduct of teaching, to the extent that research on teaching within the field is notable mainly for its absence."

D. Stergiou's (2004) work makes a new contribution in that it focuses specifically on teaching. Interestingly, he makes the point that, for students, both teaching ability and teacher knowledge are important, and both students' and teachers' views extend beyond simple vocationalism. His three high scoring statements (2005: 290), that is, "develops students' capacity to think for themselves," "stimulates intellectual curiosity," "reviews and modifies knowledge," suggest a deeper level of understanding of the purpose of higher education in tourism. D. Stergiou's work therefore reinforces the fact that tourism education is not confined to J. Tribe's vocational/action, but perhaps more importantly here it points to the extent to which the concerns of researchers in tourism education are joining those of a wider stream of literature concerned with higher education and teaching. Notably, it accords with Ronald Barnett's work (1999: 1997) in identifying the need for students to develop a culture of critical action and to learn to deal creatively with the unpredictable.

As far as the curriculum is concerned, the debate did not end with the benchmark statement, but it has taken a rather different direction in recent years, away from a simple contest for curriculum space to a more mature consideration of the nature and direction of the knowledge, influenced by wider changes in academic approaches. This was prefigured in J. Tribe's two fields in 1997 but has found its most recent expression in the so-called "cultural turn" (Ateljevic *et al.*,

2007). Cara Aitchison (2006) relates that to the evolution more generally in the social sciences in the last 20 years with the development of engagement with poststructural theory and with the linking of the cultural and the critical. For tourism, this came in part with the increasing engagement of cultural geographers and sociologists who had taken the cultural turn rather earlier. She suggests:

> *In tourism studies, the "turn to culture" coincided with the turn of the new century where subsequent developments have been evident in the publication of a range of research embracing new theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches and research techniques influenced by the developing poststructural literature in social science.*

This was later developed in the work of Annette Pritchard, Nigel Morgan, and Irene Ateljevic (2007). The result for C. Aitchison (2006: 417) is that "tourism studies, with its social and cultural underpinning, has emerged as a distinct field from tourism management, with its primarily economic underpinning."

Whether or not it is truly the case as far as the curriculum is concerned, given the broad coverage of most tourism programmes which embrace both "management" and "studies," is here less important than the fact that it represents a rather more profound development than the earlier arguments about the curriculum and, perhaps more importantly, brings tourism into a more mainstream of educational thinking in the social sciences.

J. Tribe's (2006: 360-381) recent examination of tourism knowledge represents a further way in which work related to tourism education is bringing it closer to the broader mainstream of issues concerning knowledge and education. Drawing on the work of Viv Burr (1995) and Edward Said (1994) and on what he refers to as "knowledge difficulties in the social sciences" (cited in Tribe, 2006: 361), J. Tribe provides a critique of the ways in which tourism knowledge has been constructed, influenced by what he calls a double selectivity in arriving at truth about tourism: selectivity by the researcher and selectivity by the research. The importance here is that this represents another important step for tourism as a field of study becoming self-critical and alert to broader issues about itself that extend far beyond the basic curriculum debates of the 1990s. Again, it is a pointer to tourism reaching a point of maturity.

However, not all the indicators are quite so clear in their indications of maturity. J. Tribe has made a cogent case that tourism is not an academic discipline (1997: 642, 2000b: 809-813) but, as he says, "disciplines are not the *sine qua non* of knowledge production" (1997: 646). Perhaps more important for the educator is whether as a field of study tourism offers theoretical coherence, knowledge which is uniquely its own, and what Jan Meyer and Ray Land (2005) have referred to as threshold knowledge. Under these headings, tourism is still some way from maturity in the sense that it can stand and operate independently. There is as yet no coherent theoretical framework for tourism as a subject of study; rather its boundaries are still defined by tourism as a field of practice. Knowledge about tourism still draws heavily from other disciplines and consequently remains multidisciplinary with examples of interdisciplinary knowledge creation from within tourism being few and far between (Airey, 2002: 16). And it is hard to think of knowledge from within tourism that represents a kind of threshold, which, once entered and passed, leads on to new and, for the individual, previously inaccessible ways of thinking. For J. Meyer and R. Land (2005), such knowledge is represented for example by "opportunity cost" for economists, "signification and deconstruction" for literary studies, "precedence" for law, or "limits" for pure mathematics. As the author (Airey, forthcoming) suggests:

> *From the perspective of tourism, just as it is difficult to identify examples of interdisciplinary knowledge, so it is difficult to pinpoint this kind of threshold knowledge in a form that is tourism specific. Perhaps [John] Urry's Tourism Gaze (1990) or the tourism multiplier (Archer, 1977) come close to it, but these concepts really have their origins in other disciplines.*

Evidence of a lack of maturity compared with other social sciences also lies in the broad acceptance of tourism knowledge by a wider community. Vocationalism in the sense of tourism education providing preparation for first careers or for whole careers still lies at the heart of much education. What is much less well developed is tourism education and the tourism academy providing knowledge and influencing developments more generally or being recognized as a source of competitive advantage. Cooper (2006: 48) has pointed out that, "while the pivotal role of knowledge as a competitive tool has long been recognised," the idea of formalizing the capture of knowledge really dates only from the 1980s, but more importantly here, tourism has been slow in adopting this so-called "knowledge management," partly because of the gap between researchers and the tourism sector, and also what he calls a "hostile knowledge adoption environment" (Cooper, 2006: 47). The close relationship between physical scientists or engineers or even between sociologists, economists and psychologists and their worlds of practice in the exchange of knowledge or in research funding is rarely replicated in tourism. This may represent one of the final elements of maturity in which knowledge creation and knowledge dissemination, whether through engagement with students or with the wider world, are as developed as other fields of enquiry. As C. Cooper has noted, there is still a long way to go before that stage is reached.

Conclusion

Clearly tourism as a subject for study and tourism education itself has come a long way in 40 years. It has moved well beyond simply the study of an industry or preparation for first employment, and those working in the field have explored and developed the knowledge territory and, after considerable debate, have arrived at broad agreement about a curriculum. From this point it has joined a more mainstream of education reflected here in the consideration about what makes effective teaching in tourism; debates about the broad directions of the curriculum to meet changing knowledge environments; and critiques about the knowledge base itself and how it is developed. All of these represent more mature concerns of tourism educators and of the tourism education literature with implications for the tourism field of study. Whether this truly represents maturity remains open to question. For at the same time tourism still seems to be far from the kind of independence and theoretical coherence associated with more traditional disciplines and it is still a long way from truly informing debate and development in its wider world. Perhaps the most important next steps for tourism in the academy, as for all subjects of study, are to keep developing its research base both in coverage and quality, and to keep developing its teaching. These are the marks of subjects that count in the long term.

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Notes

1 Reader in Tourism, University of Surrey 1972-1989.

2 These titles are taken from existing undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered in four UK universities.

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