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Commentary on Tourism and Mobilities
The End of Tourism as We Know it?

Introduction

The twenty first century has seen the social sciences rediscovering tourism as an area for research by combining social and spatial approaches into a 'mobilities' paradigm. To quote Hannam et al (2006) this paradigm encompasses "both the large scale movement of people, objects and capital… as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement.., and the travel of material things" (p. 1) . The mobilities paradigm challenges the traditional approach taken by many tourism academics by viewing tourism as but one form of 'mobility', located within a spectrum ranging from permanent migration to daily shopping, where tourism is rethought as a form of 'voluntary temporary mobility in relation to home' (Hall, 2005). In this paradigm, tourism is no longer treated as a discrete, distinct or special activity, but simply one that is a part of a range of other activities in a mobile society. Larsen et al (2007) justify this approach by arguing that the world in the twenty first century is a highly mobile one and because tourism is relatively inexpensive and convenient, it blends with other forms of mobility and connections. This leads to the notion of tourism as part of a 'leisure mobility spectrum' ranging from daily leisure around the home through to tourism where an overnight stay is taken. Here, what may initially be a tourism-related mobility – travelling to and from a second home for example, may eventually become retirement migration. The mobilities paradigm does create a number of opportunities for tourism research, but also a number of challenges.

Opportunities and Challenges for Tourism Researchers

In terms of opportunities, the paradigm raises important issues for tourism. In particular, the notion of the 'rooted' and the 'mobile' encapsulates tourism well and highlights the consequences of both the patterns and processes of movement and the consequences for sustainability and communities at the nodes (see Lund-Durlacher and

Dimanche, 2013). Importantly, by foregrounding movement it highlights the fact that tourism movements are now massive in scale in terms of people, capital and labour and can be viewed as complex constellations of mobility – multi-layered and multi-scaled (Cresswell, 2010). The key question however, is to understand and explain what influences these movements, from micro-personal resources, to macro geo-politics and the restructuring of economies and territories.

However, not everyone can be part of this world of movement. The concept of differentiated mobilities reflects structures and hierarchies of power, recognising that there are many in the world whose mobility is highly limited (Cohen and Cohen, 2015). The ability to travel involves mustering the personal resources needed and yet, some argue that the mobilities approach ignores these inequalities. Only two or three percent of the world's population engage in international tourism, and some that do are 'hypermobile', a kinetic elite engaging in many trips in any one year. The less mobile are an important and valuable research area for tourism, but it is somewhat neglected in the mobilities approach (Hannam et al, 2014). A further research opportunity lies in the area of technology. There is much focus in the tourism literature on the role of technology, not only in terms of the distribution channels but also how it is changing consumer decision making and allowing a new approach to curating the destination. Here, the mobilities paradigm recognises that mobile technologies such as smart phones and tablets expand and modify the traditional contours of tourism movement and create a convergence of people's physical movement and their digital traces on say, Facebook. This allows for geographically independent leisure lifestyles and creates a rich research field (Hannam et al, 2014).

In terms of these research priorities however, the mobilities paradigm is yet to develop new research tools that can deliver the promise of the approach. Andreaa et al (2011) for example conclude that methods and techniques have not kept pace with the conceptual developments in the mobilities paradigm. The research tools and techniques used to date focus around mapping, tracking and mobile forms of research methods such as ethnography, but with the associated ethical issues of tracking and the participant's complicity in the process. Whilst the use of global positioning systems does not allow for a deep understanding of the underlying reasons and explanations for the movement patterns, smartphone technology holds the promise of allowing real time questions to be posed to participants during tracking.

Nonetheless, the mobilities paradigm does create challenges for tourism research. Firstly, it acts to blur the hard-won clarity on tourism definitions. It blurs the distinction

between home, work and tourist destinations; and between differing types of traveller – whether they are commuters, shoppers or migrants. This makes reconciling the 'mobilities' approach with drawing up 'definitions' of tourism problematic – particularly when we go back to the definitions of tourism designed by the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The UNWTO's definitions see tourism as a distinct activity, taking place away from home and for a period of more than twenty-four hours. Of course, the formal definitions do now recognize the day trip as an activity, but there is no recognition of the 'spectrum of mobilities' that tourism may embrace, and there is a rigid exclusion of certain types of mobile populations such as migrants, refugees and travellers. So, whilst agencies such as the UNWTO argue the importance of discipline and precision in defining tourism for measurement and policy purposes, the mobilities approach takes a more vague and 'fuzzy' stance.

Secondly, the mobilities paradigm can be thought of as a two-edged sword for tourism as a subject. One the one hand, it begs the question as to whether tourism as a subject of study should be a separate and 'exotic' area of study and research (Franklin and Crang, 2001). The paradigm views tourism as but one part of a constellation of movement, and in so doing it denies the 'extraordinariness' and special nature of tourism in people's lives. On the other hand however, mobilities makes the case for some elements of tourism explanation to be more closely linked to geography and sociology in the spirit of 'post-disciplinarity'. This is most certainly an advantage for tourism as it brings it in from the academic fringes to the mainstream.

Conclusion

To conclude, is the mobilities paradigm the basis for theory that tourism has been searching for, or does it simply lead us up a blind alley as Aramberri (2005) states? The mobilities paradigm certainly creates both opportunities and challenges for tourism, it helps to place tourism research in the mainstream of the social sciences, breaking down disciplinary silos and encouraging connections to be made across scales and topics (Hannam et al , 2006). But it is not without its critics - some question whether it really is a 'new' paradigm, simply re-treading the long tradition of viewing tourism as part of the 'leisure activity spectrum' or 'recreation opportunities spectrum' (see for example Clark and Stankey, 1979). Indeed, more broadly, the mobilities paradigm has resonances of the early quantitative geography of the 1960s, summarised by writers such as Hagerstrand (1982) and revisited by Hall (2005). Others argue that it is too broad and diverse an approach (Adey et al, 2014) and so cannot

make real contributions to the research 'impact' agenda or solutions to the 'big global issues of the day - such as climate change, poverty alleviation or the green economy.

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