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# **WHOLE TOURISM SYSTEMS**

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**1992**

**WHOLE TOURISM SYSTEMS:  
INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON STRUCTURES,  
FUNCTIONS, ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND MANAGEMENT**

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Tourism and Gambling. GeoJournal 19:269-275, 1989.

Main Destination Ratios: Analyses of Tourist Flows. Annals of Tourism Research 16:530-541, 1989.

Tourist Attraction Systems. Annals of Tourism Research 17:367-384, 1990.

Partial-Industrialization of Tourism Systems. Annals of Tourism Research 17:600-605, 1990.

## ABSTRACT

This study's two aims were to refine a model of tourism systems and to demonstrate the utility of interdisciplinary research based around that model. Tourism has been described and defined as a form of human behaviour, a market, an industry, a sector of the economy, and a system. The first concept in that list may be the most useful basis for scholarship on tourism; the others are associated phenomena. Tourism gives rise to whole tourism systems, arrangements of people (tourists), places (in their itineraries) and enterprising or service organisations (in the travel and tourism industry). Each whole system has an indeterminate number of sub-systems. Models of whole systems can be used as a higher order concept at the centre of interdisciplinary research into tourism, giving cohesion to what would otherwise be fragmented studies into facets of the field. This approach is applied, in the present study, to a range of topics.

The concepts of business and industry were reviewed, and applications in tourism investigated empirically. An organisation can be in a certain line of business but remain outside, or on the fringes of, the corresponding industry. Research supports the hypothesis that tourism tends to be partially industrialized, referring to a condition where only a portion of the organisations directly supplying tourists are in that specific industry. The partial industrialization of whole tourism systems has several implications that remain hidden by the conventional idea of assuming every tourist-supplier to be in that industry.

A second topic was people as tourists. The model of whole tourism systems is useful for researching links between tourism, leisure and gambling.

A third topic presents a new statistical technique. The main destination ratio integrates data collected at two points in each whole tourism system: at the departure point from a traveller generating country and at arrival gateways in each destination country.

Japanese tourism is a topic that has been widely discussed elsewhere: its place in the present project was to demonstrate how a whole systems approach provides a means for a broad-based discussion on a given category of tourism.

Attractions seem synonymous with tourism, yet the topic has been under-researched to date. Attraction systems can be studied as a vital sub-system in all whole tourism systems.

A vast literature is available on the environmental impacts of tourism. Almost all of it is concerned with impacts on the environments of places visited by tourists. A wider perspective is provided by considering whole systems in their environmental settings.

Complexities in managing a tourism system can be understood by contrasting two conditions, high and low levels of industrialization, and considering the impact of this variable on certain management issues in tourism. The issues discussed are seasonal variations, proliferating variety, marketing management's use of feedback, the adoption of a marketing concept.

This project adds to the belief that an interdisciplinary approach is useful for broad-based research on tourism. It may add credibility to the opinion that a distinct discipline, an organised body of knowledge, can be developed, to stand in the centre of mono-disciplinary methods for particular issues. Finally, a number of ideas for future research arose from this project, from each of its topics.

## BACKGROUND

Central to theoretical research is the development of models which represent the topic being studied. Research on tourism has involved models which may be divided into two broad categories. First, there are many models which represent some facet of tourism; usually these are expressed in terms of particular disciplines pertinent to the facet being studied. Second, there are models which attempt to represent the totality of the subject and which are expressed in systematic form. These may be described as general models of tourism or, in Getz' (1986) term, whole systems models of tourism, an example of which was set out by Leiper (1979,1980,1981). In those studies, many topics and issues were recognized as related to tourism, but four broad threads were singled out as elementary. The four threads were, firstly, people in roles as tourists; secondly, places in roles in tourists' itineraries, thirdly, organisations involved in supplying goods and services; and fourth, environmental factors where causes and effects of the activity could be identified.

Seminal works informing Leiper's research included Cuervo (1967), Peters (1969), Gunn (1972), Burkart and Medlik (1974), Ritchie (1974), Wahab (1975), Turner and Ash (1975), MacCannell (1976), Matley (1976), Jafari (1977), McIntosh (1977), Pigram and Cooper (1977), Pizam (1978), Buck (1978), and Valene Smith (1978). These represented several different disciplinary perspectives on tourism: geography, economics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, management, landscape architecture and others.

The problem of how to combine diverse ideas into a coherent model was addressed by drawing on general system theory. Key references here included Bertalanffy (1972) and several contributors in collections edited by Emery (1969) and Klir (1972). A model of "tourism systems" was proposed. Its geographical elements stemmed from a simple geographical construct about tourism proposed by Mariot (cited by Matley 1976). The new model represented a slight revision to Mariot's construct, superimposed human and industrial elements, expressed the arrangement in systemic form, and indicated the open attribute by identifying a number of environmental factors. The utility of general systems theory was that it provided a means for rendering simple what is otherwise a complex phenomena, permitting an integrated holistic perspective of tourism-related issues.

Three fundamental concepts in the model were identified, related but distinct: "tourist", "tourism", and "tourism industry". "Tourism" was conceptualized as a system, defined in terms of its constituent elements (Leiper 1979). Five elements were identified as present in every whole tourism system:

- (i) a human element, at least one person in a tourist role;
- (ii) three geographical elements, at least three places in three roles: one tourist generating region, at least one transit route, and at least one tourist destination region;
- (iii) an industrial element, the tourism industry, comprising a collection of organisations in the business of tourism.

In Chapter 2 of the present study, this systemic model is described by means of diagrams. Tourism systems are generally quite open in their interaction with environments, which are identified as technological, physical, economic, socio-cultural and political. A suggestion will be advanced that tourism systems tend to be partially-industrialized, meaning that the tourism industry represents only part of the total resources supplying goods, services and facilities used by tourists.

Leiper's (1979) model is one of several in the literature referring to tourism systems. Cuevo (1967), Gunn (1972) and Marriot (cited by Matley 1976) presented earlier models; Mill and Morrison (1985) and Jafari (1987) offered later versions. All share similarities, and each has distinct features. Leiper's (1979) model emerged from an interdisciplinary holistic approach, and thus may facilitate multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary research on virtually any aspect of tourism, on theoretical or applied topics. The range of writers who have adopted Leiper's (1979) model and its associated concepts for studies on various topics relating to tourism support that contention. For instance Henshall and Roberts (1985) used the model as a framework for studying how New Zealand is promoted internationally as a tourist destination; Towner (1985) used it in historical research on the Grand Tour; Boniface and Cooper (1987) structured the first half of a book on modern European tourism around the systems model; van Doorn (1982) adapted it for research on policy; Hodgson (1983) applied it in a consultancy study on tourism in Palmerston North. Educational applications of the work occurred first where the research had been conducted, in Sydney, as discussed by Stear (1981). Certain aspects of the model and its implications have been criticized by Stephen Smith (1988), notably its departure from the idea that sees tourism as an industry.

Putting aside that issue for now (Smith's criticisms are taken up in Chapter 3) axiomatically there is no such thing as a perfect model. Thus the original formulation of the model, and its foundation concepts, offer scope for revision. There is also scope for applying the model and its component concepts to various topics dealing with aspects of tourism systems. These are the broad themes of the present work.

## **THE NEED FOR THE RESEARCH**

Three needs were behind research in the present work. One was a need to revise a model of whole tourism systems, rendering it potentially more useful. Another need was to investigate certain topics and issues which are relatively ignored in the academic literature. A third need involves the question of how tourism might be researched. These three needs are discussed below.

A need existed to review the model and associated concepts of tourism systems set out in Leiper (1979,1980,1981,1985). The manner in which the fundamental concepts (tourist, tourism, tourism system, tourism industry) were expressed left various issues unclear. Is defining tourism as "a system" realistic and useful, or does it miss the mark? What are the most appropriate ways for conceptualizing "tourist"? What is a "tourism(t) industry"? Is there such an industry? What is meant by being "in the business of tourism"? Is this synonymous with being in a tourism industry? Do these questions have practical significance for business organisations and their management, and for governmental agencies interested in tourism policy?

The second need referred to the relative lack of academic research on tourism. Given the size and recent growth rates of tourism generally, the environmental issues it involves, and its suitability as a subject for research in several social science and business disciplines, one might assume tourism was a well-established subject in academic research.

Data on inbound international tourist flows to New Zealand shows that between 1975 and 1989 annual arrivals of international visitors increased every year, from 361,194 to 867,563 with the average annual growth rate over the fourteen years being 6.5% (Department of Statistics, annuals). That rate of growth in arrivals was

accompanied by similar growth in annual sums of expenditure by those tourists: a bulletin entitled New Zealand Tourism Facts published by the New Zealand Tourism Department in 1990 reported that the international inbound tourism's contribution to GDP had increased from \$350 million, representing 1.102% of GDP in 1983-4, to \$1,084 million, representing 1.700%, in 1988-9.

Correspondingly, as a source of foreign exchange, inbound tourism has been increasing in absolute and relative terms in recent years, such that in 1988 it overtook meat to become the largest item earning foreign exchange for New Zealand, according to official data assembled by the New Zealand Tourist Industry Federation (1990). Using reports from the Department of Statistics and from Air New Zealand, the N.Z.T.I.F. was able to point out that the leading items for the year to March 1989 were tourism (\$2,277 millions), meat (\$2,195 millions), dairy products (\$1,793 millions), raw wool (\$1,811 millions), agriculture manufacturing (\$1,256 millions) and other manufacturing (\$1,733 millions). Besides those economic benefits, tourism tends to create a mix of impacts (beneficial and damaging) which may be observable in many kinds of environments: economic, social, physical (Mathieson and Wall 1982).

All this might suggest that considerable academic research was being focussed on tourism. This is not so. Before 1990, only two doctoral theses specifically dealing with tourism have been presented in Massey University. However those twin studies mean this University has been relatively prolific by international standards. Jafari and Aaser (1988) catalogued the doctoral theses dealing specifically with any aspect of tourism presented in accredited universities in the U.S.A. and Canada between 1951 and 1987. They discovered only 157 theses over those twenty seven years. In only four years were ten or more theses presented: in 1975 (10), in 1980 (10) in 1984 (11) and in 1986 (15), although they admit their data for 1987 were probably incomplete. Jafari and Aaser analyzed the 157 theses in several ways, including apparent main disciplines as reflected by the university department where each degree was awarded. "The largest number of dissertations on tourism was in the field of economics (40), followed by anthropology (25), geography (24) and recreation (23)" (ibid:413). Among the 45 remaining from the 157 in total, business had 11, education had nine, and seven were in sociology. No comparable survey is known relating to New Zealand; C.M.Hall's investigations on the issue in Australia found only three doctoral theses on tourism prior to 1988 (pers. comm.).

One possible reason for the small quantity of doctoral theses focussing on tourism is that there is not much which remains unknown on the subject. One authority rejects this: "What is known about tourism is limited to some fragmented studies ..." (Jafari 1987:151). What all this fundamentally leads to is a realization that there is scope for a great deal more academic research into many aspects of tourism. Several topics forming central themes in several chapters of the present study are relatively rare in the literature. Specific remarks supporting that assertion are offered later in this Chapter, where the topics are described.

Accordingly, further academic work on tourism is needed because the subject represents a large phenomenon which has not been extensively researched, and within which certain topics appear to have been overlooked to date by academic researchers.

A third need has been identified from considering how tourism is studied. The growing academic interest in tourism has come from several faculties and within faculties, there are usually multiple disciplines and sub-disciplines employed. A review of this issue identified sixteen disciplines that "lend their theories and techniques to the study of tourism" (Jafari and Ritchie 1981:20). The sixteen were anthropology, agriculture, business, economics, ecology, education, geography, hotel and restaurant administration, law, marketing, parks and recreation, political science, psychology, sociology, transportation, urban and regional planning.

In that review, Jafari and Ritchie saw tourism as a subject for attention by a diverse range of academic sources, with contributions stemming from different individuals using different disciplines. But, as they implied, the process is fragmented, for they saw no discipline as central, none having a coordinating function and they remarked that, in an educational setting, "multidisciplinary programs, by their nature, require the student to carry out the integration" (ibid:24). Bodewes (1981) has also reviewed the question of disciplines; he remarked that an impediment for tourism studies in the scientific community of universities is that it "is not one academic discipline but the object of many" (ibid:39). From this he concluded "there is a sound case for a multidisciplinary study of tourism" but he observed problems because this suggests a treatment that is "broad, a bit of everything, no depth whatsoever" (ibid). Another review of the same issue led to similar findings, but offered a solution:

**...unless some linking discipline provides a synthesis, a multidisciplinary approach to a complex theme remains fragmented...(and) there is the risk, not unique to tourism scholarship, that the contributions drawn from particular disciplines will be overemphasized, diluted, or distorted, rendering a valid synthesis impossible (Leiper 1981:71).**

These three reviews, by Jafari and Ritchie (1981), Bodewes (1981), and Leiper (1981) focussed on educational courses dealing with tourism, but the same problems have been demonstrated in academic research. Iso-Ahola's (1982) striking criticism of Dann's (1981) work on tourist motivation is an example; Iso-Ahola showed that the disciplines Dann had drawn on in a very extensive literature review omitted those with major relevance to his subject matter, resulting in a deficient appreciation of the topic. Many researchers are conscious of this problem and acknowledge the limits of the discipline(s) they have used. Sauran's (1978) research into demand for overseas holidays is an example. He pointed out that his discipline, economics, did not illuminate all aspects of his topic, and expressed caution about his conclusions. Medawar's comment on the relationship between particular disciplines and the growth of knowledge clarifies the issue from another point of view:

**We are mistaking the direction of the flow of knowledge when we speak of analyzing or reducing a phenomenon to physics or chemistry. What we endeavour to do is the very opposite: to assemble, integrate or piece together our conception of the phenomenon from our particular knowledge of its constituent parts (Medawar 1969:34).**

The apparent need for, and the resulting problems of a multidisciplinary approach are not unique to tourism. Argyris (1989) discussed impediments to an integration of disciplines in studying management. He used Kuhn's (1970) conclusions about the social sciences, besides empirical investigations amongst management academics. Kuhn showed that each discipline tends to develop within a distinct community of scholars, and showed that each community tends to develop its own norms which are "inherently conservative. They do not encourage co-operation with and integration of several different disciplines; indeed, they discourage these activities" (Argyris 1989:9). Discussing higher education generally, Barnett (1990) asserted that fragmented multidisciplinary approaches

leave much to be desired. He argued in favour of a "critical interdisciplinary" approach.

In tourism education, the sorts of multidisciplinary programs reviewed by Jafari and Ritchie (1981), Bodewes (1981) and Leiper (1981) are common, despite alleged deficiencies identified by the three reviews a decade ago. All three indicated a need to develop methods for integrating the multidiscipline curriculum, as a way of combating fragmentation problems. Bodewes indicated one approach being explored in the Netherlands Institute for Tourism and Leisure Studies. It is to treat tourism as a sub-set of leisure, and place leisure studies at the core of the multidisciplinary curriculum. Leiper suggested developing a distinct discipline of tourism studies to become the central core of an interdisciplinary program. The distinction between multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary methods was described as follows:

**Multidisciplinary simply implies that more than one discipline is brought to bear on a topic. Interdisciplinary implies something extra, that the methodology involves working between the disciplines, blending various philosophies and techniques so that the particular disciplines do not stand apart but are brought together intentionally and explicitly to seek a synthesis (Leiper 1981:72).**

The blending device was to be an embryonic discipline of tourism studies, where the core concepts are expressed in general systems terms. Thus, while Bodewes (1981) suggested resolving the problems associated with multiple disciplines by treating tourism as a sub-set of leisure, Leiper (1981) suggested developing a new discipline of tourism based on a model expressed in interdisciplinary systemic terms. This might be receptive to ideas from the diverse range of other disciplines relating to aspects of tourism.

Jafari and Ritchie (1981) offered a different solution. Reviewing the remarks of Bodewes and Leiper and drawing on Meeth's (1978) work on epistemology, they suggested a transdisciplinary approach would be most beneficial for studying tourism. Like an interdisciplinary approach, it involves starting with the issue or problem, not the discipline, and bringing to bear the knowledge of those disciplines that contribute to a resolution. It still leaves unresolved the question of how to blend and integrate the diverse disciplines that might seem relevant to the issue.

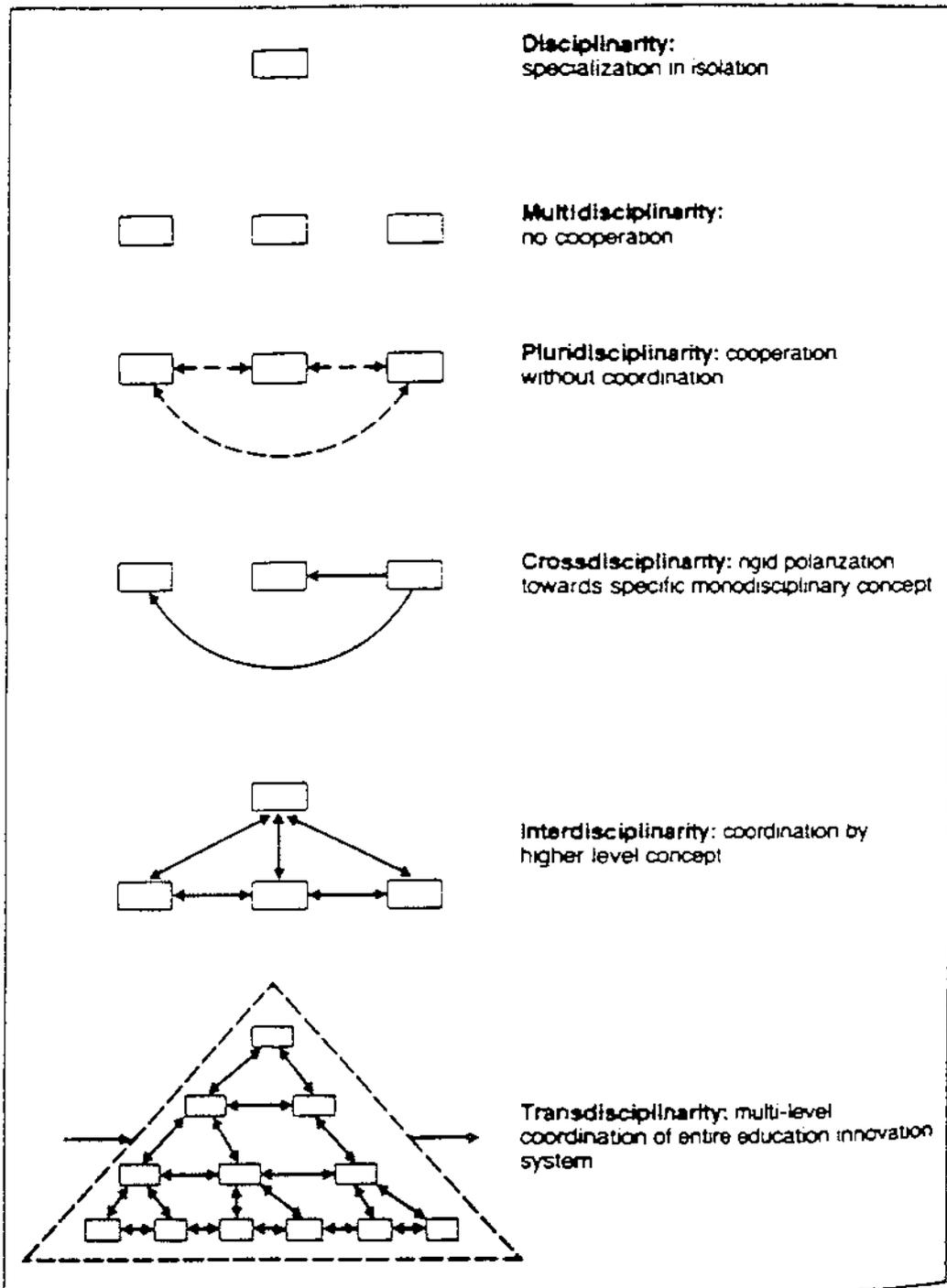


Figure 1.1 : Approaches to coordinating disciplines in research  
(From Mitchell 1989, after Jantsch 1972).

That question is discussed in a study of geography and resource analysis by Mitchell (1989). He noted how the complexity of the subject indicated the desirability of using more than one discipline, and recognized that focussing on a problem (not any particular discipline) means an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approach is desirable. Mitchell endorsed Jantsch's (1972) suggestion that either of those two approaches are generally superior to multi, pluri or cross disciplinary methods. The differences are described in Figure 1.1. Unfortunately, Mitchell and Jantsch do not give concrete suggestions for coordinating a transdisciplinary approach; this is left to a "group effort, a team in which each member has a specific role relative to the problem under analysis" (Mitchell 1989:308).

Thus an interdisciplinary approach, where "coordination by a higher level concept" (see Figure 1.1) is sought, may be the optimum approach for researching complex subjects such as those indicated by the present work. All this points to another need for this study: no substantial and multi-topical studies on tourism are known that have consciously pursued an interdisciplinary approach.

## **AIMS OF THE RESEARCH**

This project has two linked aims, stemming from the needs described above.

### **Aim #1: A model of whole tourism systems**

One aim of the present study is to refine a model of whole tourism systems and review definitions of core concepts in that model: tourist, tourism, tourism system, tourist(m) industry. The objective is a model which may be applied in wide-ranging research, on many topics related to tourism.

### **Aim #2: An Interdisciplinary method**

Research for the present study began in each of its topics rather than particular disciplines. In other words the approach has not begun by assuming that studying tourism means studying "the geography of tourism", "the psychology of tourism", "the management of tourism" and so on. Thus the study's second aim is to attempt to show how tourism can be studied as an interdisciplinary subject. The implications of this aim, and the kind of approach it involves, are discussed below.