



The Nature of Tourism Research

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Discuss alternative definitions of tourism.
- Explain why tourism is not an industry.
- Identify and compare different forms of research in the study of tourism.
- Define and explain the differences among the terms: models, concepts, hypotheses and theories.
- Explain generally what epistemology means and describe some of the major epistemologies used to study tourism.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Tourism is complex, perhaps among the most complex topics in social science. It is a form of human behaviour; a social phenomenon; an economic sector; a policy field; and a source of social, environmental and economic change. It can create jobs or destroy them. It displaces traditional cultures as well as reinvigorates them. It brings people together as well as divides them.

Researchers who study tourism look at it from many different perspectives, from anthropology to economics. They use many different tools, from participant observation to statistical analysis, to collect and analyse data. They ask many different types of questions, and use the answers for many different types of purposes.

This chapter will introduce you to some of the ways that social scientists think about tourism and how they ask questions about it. A core message of this chapter is that there is no single 'right' way of doing tourism research. However, research can be done well or not so well. Understanding some of the key perspectives – what social scientists call 'paradigms' – is important to help you pose questions that can be answered by research and to design a research plan to provide those answers. Tourism research requires both knowledge you learn through study (which is the purpose of this book) and skills you develop by doing research, especially with the guidance of an experienced researcher.

To begin our journey, we will start with a typically academic question: what is tourism?

WHAT IS TOURISM?

Definitions are something academics like to discuss and debate, not just because of the intellectual fun of debate but because definitions have profound relevance for research. All tourism research is fundamentally shaped by how the researcher defines tourism. The definition may be explicit or implicit, but there is always a definition of tourism somewhere behind every research project. There are many different definitions because the definitions are used for many different purposes. A few of these purposes include monitoring trends in the volume of visitors coming to a destination; identifying markets; planning product development; formulating policy; or outlining the scope of a book or journal.

Researchers sometimes suggest there are two basic ways of defining tourism. One might be called 'supply-side', the other, 'demand-side'. A supply-side definition emphasizes the businesses and other organizations that provide tourism services. A demand-side definition focuses on the people engaged in tourism as consumers. While the supply-side and demand-side distinctions are useful, they miss the full diversity of tourism definitions. Other approaches emphasize tourism as a system combining supply and demand or even as a field of study or set of beliefs. Most definitions include, in some form, the ideas of the temporary movement of people and services for those people. However, the relative emphasis on these varies and, as you will see in [Table 1.1](#), definitions may include other concepts.

An important definition not included in [Table 1.1](#) is the definition by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2007). I left this out of the table because it is significant

enough to merit separate attention. The World Tourism Organization, a United Nations organization with 157 member nations, has been mandated by the United Nations to collect, analyse, publish, standardize and improve tourism statistics serving the general purposes of international organizations. Its definition thus enjoys official status for the purpose of tourism statistics. UNWTO's definition has been accepted by most national statistical offices as the guide for collecting and reporting on the number of international visitors and the value of their spending. It defines tourism as the activity of people temporarily away from their usual environment for a period not exceeding 1 year, and for virtually any purpose of travel, with the following exceptions: persons visiting a place for the purpose of earning money during their visit and students in long-term programmes (1 year or more, even though they may periodically return home) are not considered to be engaged in tourism. Similarly, members of diplomatic corps and members of the military while travelling in their official capacity are not considered to be engaged in tourism. Also, refugees and nomads are not counted as visitors.

Beyond these exceptions, virtually anyone making a temporary trip away from her or his usual place of residence may be considered to be engaged in tourism. This includes not just people on vacation, but people travelling to see family or friends, travelling for medical purposes, religious purposes, study visits, business meetings or conventions. Those who take tourism trips are called **visitors**; those who stay overnight are called **tourists**; those who return home without spending the night away are called **same-day visitors** (sometimes they are also called excursionists, but this term

Table 1.1. Examples of tourism definitions.

Definition	Comments
Tourism is a sum of relations and phenomena resulting from the travel and stay of non-residents in as much as this stay does not create a permanent residence (Sessa, 1971, p. 5)	This is an early demand-side definition, emphasizing the concepts of residency and non-residency. It does not address motives of travel beyond the explicit exclusion of travel to change residence. The phrase 'sum of relations and phenomena' is vague
Tourism is the study of man away from his usual habitat, of the industry which responds to his needs, and of the impacts that both he and the industry have on the hosts' socio-cultural economic and physical environments (Jafari, 1977, p. 5)	Jafari developed this definition to explain the scope of a journal he founded, <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> . It expresses a broad conception of tourism – supply, demand and impacts. Note that the definition describes tourism as a field of study
Tourism can be defined as the science, art, and business of attracting and transporting visitors, accommodating them, and graciously catering to their needs and wants (McIntosh and Goeldner, 1977, p. ix)	McIntosh wrote this supply-side definition in a textbook to emphasize tourism as an industry and career choice. Note that it specifies attractions, transport and accommodation as well as other needs
The tourist industry consists of all those firms, organizations, and facilities which are intended to serve the specific needs and wants of tourists (Leiper, 1979, p. 390)	This is an early supply-side definition emphasizing the sources of services for tourists, whom Leiper defines as 'a person making a discretionary, temporary tourism which involves at least one overnight stay' and excluding any activities to earn money while on the trip
Tourism is the amalgam of industries that directly supply goods and services to facilitate business, pleasure, and leisure activities away from the home environment (Canadian National Task Force on Tourism Data, 1989, p. 31)	This Task Force definition was developed to provide a framework to support the collection of tourism statistics, and to emphasize tourism as a form of economic activity to permit comparisons between tourism and other industries. It proposes that tourism be viewed as a 'synthetic' industry – a combination of other industries

(Continued)

Table 1.1. Continued.

Definition	Comments
Tourism is the set of ideas, the theories, or ideologies for being a tourist, and it is the behaviour of people in touristic roles, when the ideas are put into place (Leiper, 1990, p. 17)	Compare this later definition by Leiper with his earlier one. In this later definition, he has moved away from a supply-side view and describes tourism more abstractly – as a set of ideas. Leiper is now focusing on tourism as an ‘-ism’ (such as ‘capitalism’ or ‘socialism’). Note, he frames tourism in terms of touristic roles
Tourism may be defined as the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the interaction of tourists, business suppliers, host governments and host communities in the process of attracting and hosting these tourists and other visitors (McIntosh and Goeldner, 1990, p. 4)	McIntosh has moved from his earlier supply-side definition to this more systemic view of tourism. He implicitly includes not just the provision of services but also activities such as marketing, planning and information services. ‘Tourists’ refers to temporary visitors staying overnight; ‘other visitors’ refers to same-day visitors
Tourism itself is an abstraction. It doesn’t exist ... it is not even a discipline ... it is a field made up of many physical, programme and action parts (Gunn and Var, 2002, p. 4)	Gunn and Var offer a provocative view of tourism – that it does not exist in a discrete or tangible way. This view is presented as background to their ideas about tourism planning, noting that such planning must be for specific entities such as attractions or destination regions

can be confusing because it is also applied to people taking side-trips during the course of a vacation).

The concept of usual place of residence – sometimes referred to as usual environment – is central to this definition. It means that tourism is something you do when you travel away from where you normally live. So how does a researcher determine when someone has travelled outside their usual environment? The UNWTO notes that each country will develop its own operational definition. There are at least four ways operationally to define usual environment.

The first is to allow travellers to self-define themselves. For example, a researcher might simply ask, ‘How many trips did you take out of town last month?’ There is some appeal in allowing respondents to decide themselves whether they took a trip to outside their usual environment, but this approach has a couple of disadvantages. Respondents may ask, ‘What do you mean by “out of town”?’ This can happen when the respondent lives in a place where two or more municipalities are immediately contiguous to each other. In other words, should a person walking only 100 m from one city

into its neighbouring city and who thus technically has left town (with respect to the city where she lives) be considered to have taken a tourism trip? Not likely. Then there is the problem of people who live in rural areas, not 'towns'. Moreover, it is impossible to make reliable comparisons of tourism behaviour among individuals or populations because there is no assurance that respondents are defining the concept in comparable ways.

Another approach is to use trip frequency. One might argue that any destination you visit at least once per month over the course of a year is part of your usual environment. This approach, too, is logical. If you visit a place frequently, regardless of how far away it is, it could reasonably be considered to be part of your usual environment. However, this approach also has inherent limitations. In particular, it does not address the question of how a destination should be defined – that is, is it a business, a neighbourhood, a city, a province or state, or even a nation? On the other hand, if you visited a museum only once that is only 5 km from your home in a part of town you normally never visit, is it outside your usual environment?

You might use a legal boundary such as a national border (this is conceptually similar to the notion of 'going out of town'). Indeed, the boundary approach defines international visitors. However, the boundary approach may not work well when applied to domestic tourism. City boundaries are often just a political construction rather than a behavioural or social reality. Adjacent counties or regions often do not represent truly different environments and you might not even notice the border when

you cross it. Provincial or state borders are more likely to represent different environments, but there is still much intra-provincial travel that does not match what researchers (or marketers) would consider to be truly tourism. Intra-provincial travel can also be an important form of tourism on which many businesses depend, so excluding intra-provincial travel is not wise.

Finally, you can use a distance threshold, defining any trip beyond a specified distance to be tourism. While the choice of a distance threshold is arbitrary, the use of distance has some advantages. The choice of an appropriate threshold could represent what you consider to be a reasonable approximation of your usual environment. The use of distance ensures statistical consistency across populations and jurisdictions, and over time. Distance thresholds also avoid the debate about the nature and scale of destinations.

However defined, tourism may be classified into six forms: three that are basic and three that are combinations of the basic forms. **Domestic** tourism refers to trips taken by a person in the country where he or she lives. If you take a trip in the country where you live, you are engaged in domestic tourism. If you leave the country where you live to visit another country, you are engaged in **outbound** tourism (from the perspective of your country). The country you are visiting will consider you to be an **inbound** tourist. The process of crossing borders – both inbound and outbound – represents **international** tourism. A key concept in each definition is the country of residence. Your citizenship is not an issue in determining what form of tourism you are engaged in; the issue is where you live. Thus, a person who is a citizen of

the USA but living in Canada would be considered by the USA to be an international visitor when he travels to the USA. He would not be a domestic visitor in the USA, because he does not live there even though he is a citizen of the USA.

Two other forms of tourism are recognized by the UNWTO, although these terms are not widely used. **National** tourism refers to all the tourism trips made by the residents of a given country, whether domestically or to other countries. **Internal** tourism refers to all the tourism trips made in a given country, whether by visitors coming from another country or by residents of that country. Figure 1.1 describes these combinations. Case Study 1.1, which is included at the end of this chapter, describes the evolution of Canada's operational definition of tourism.

IS TOURISM AN INDUSTRY?

The UNWTO definition views tourism from the demand-side. Tourism is something

people do, not something businesses produce. Because an industry is a set of businesses that produce essentially the same product using essentially the same technology, tourism cannot be considered to be an industry. Tourism products (services) are too diverse to be considered to be essentially the same. Industries are identified by their core product, and are officially identified in Systems of National Accounts when their output is sufficiently large to merit monitoring by the government. Industries in any nation are categorized by Standard Industrial Classification systems that are a hierarchical listing of industries at various levels of generality. Here is a simple example of the hierarchical structure of an industry classification system (this one is based on a small part of the manufacturing sector as classified in the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS), the system used by Canada, Mexico and the USA). The numbers preceding each category are the NAICS codes for that industry:

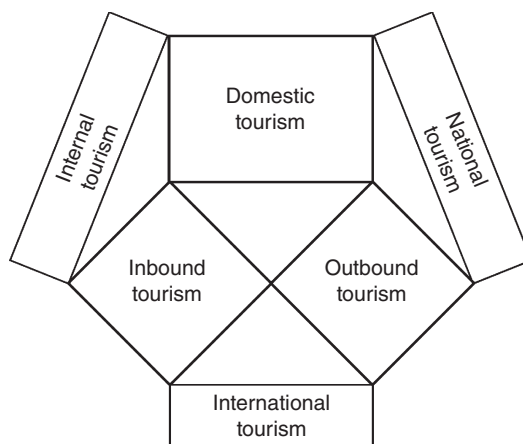


Fig. 1.1. Forms of tourism.

- 3 Manufacturing.
 - 311 Food manufacturing.
 - 3114 Fruit and vegetable preserving and specialty food manufacturing.
 - 311410 Frozen food manufacturing.

The concept of an industry is like a telescope in that it can be extended, to view a broad set of economic activities, or contracted, to examine more precisely a short list, depending on your interests. It should be noted that industries are born and they may die. Just over a century ago, there was no motor vehicle manufacturing industry (although, to be pedantic, there were no Standard Industrial Classification systems 100 years ago, either). On the other hand, there was a buggy manufacturing industry but, over time, it was replaced by the motor vehicle industry.

Returning to the question of whether tourism is an industry, the goods and services used by visitors in the course of their making tourism trips are so diverse they cannot be meaningfully thought of as being produced by a single industry. There is no logical way to think of, for example, accommodation services and air travel as being products of the same industry. However, while there is no single tourism industry, there are numerous **tourism industries**. These are industries that would cease to exist or whose output would be substantially reduced if there were no tourism. These services include accommodation, transportation, food services, recreation and entertainment (especially attractions), travel trade services (such as tour operators and travel agencies) and convention services. Collectively, these goods and services

are referred to as **tourism commodities**. Thus, tourism commodities are those goods and services that would be produced only at substantially reduced levels in the absence of tourism.

In principle, one can estimate the size of a synthetic or ‘statistical tourism industry’ by combining the outputs of all individual tourism industries. However, there are some dilemmas if you try to do that. First, not all tourism commodities (the goods and services produced by tourism industries) are consumed by visitors. Some are consumed by people engaged in non-tourism activities. For example, restaurants are a tourism industry, but many people eating in restaurants are local residents. Visitors also spend on non-tourism commodities, such as books or sunscreen. Further, tourism commodities can be produced by different tourism industries as well as by non-tourism industries. Meals are prepared and sold by airlines and hotels, not just restaurants. Furthermore, department stores might also offer tourism commodities such as a restaurant, car rental services or a travel agency as part of their services. [Table 1.2](#) illustrates this complex pattern. The columns represent tourism and non-tourism industries; the rows are tourism and non-tourism commodities. The examples in each cell illustrate types of commodities consumed by visitors. Remember,

Table 1.2. Commodity and industry patterns in tourism.

	Tourism industries	Non-tourism industries
Tourism commodities	Hotel rooms Motor coach transportation Restaurant meals	Department store restaurants Department store travel agencies University field trips
Non-tourism commodities	Long-distance telephone services in hotels Branded T-shirts sold by theme restaurants Duty-free shopping on board aircraft	Travel insurance sold by insurance companies Sunscreen sold by drug stores Travel books sold by book stores

each of these could also be purchased by a non-visitor.

In order to estimate the contribution of tourism to an economy, you need to identify what portion of the revenues in each tourism industry is due to visitors and how much to non-visitors. You also need to estimate how much visitors spend on goods and services produced by non-tourism industries. This is not easy. A method that has been developed to do this is known as the **Tourism Satellite Account** or TSA (see [Focus Box 1.1](#)). The term ‘satellite’ has nothing to do with outer space. It refers to the fact that these accounts are a satellite of (or an annex to) a country’s System of National Accounts – the accounts that describe the input and output of all economic activity in a country. The ratio between the total value of the output of an industry and the output consumed by people engaged in tourism is known as the tourism ratio. Some examples of tourism ratios for selected tourism commodities may be seen in [Table 1.3](#). The table shows revenues from

visitors (labelled ‘Tourism demand’) as well as total revenues (labelled ‘Total demand’). The **tourism ratio** is simply tourism demand divided by total demand.

The magnitudes of tourism ratios vary, reflecting different degrees of importance of visitors to the businesses in each industry. These ratios are national averages, based on total annual output. The portion of any individual business’s income from visitors can differ greatly from these averages. A locally owned coffee shop located in a predominantly residential section of a town may earn nothing from visitors, while an internationally branded restaurant located in a resort town might earn virtually 100% of its revenues from visitors. None the less, the ratios provide an indication of the extent to which each industry depends on tourism. As you can see, passenger air travel, accommodation services, travel agency services and convention fees are almost ‘pure’ tourism, whereas tourism is less important as a source of revenue for food services, vehicle fuel, and recreation and entertainment services.

Focus Box 1.1. Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSAs).

Traditionally, tourism statistics focused on the profiles and numbers of visitors. While some estimates of the economic magnitude of tourism were occasionally made, these estimates were often unreliable and not comparable to statistics on the economic magnitude of traditional industries. Although tourism is fundamentally a consumption phenomenon, governments need to understand not only the magnitude of tourism as an economic sector but also how tourism demand and supply are linked (in the context of a TSA, 'supply' refers to the total output of a tourism industry). Moreover, tourism consumption is not limited to a set of predefined goods and services. What makes tourism consumption distinct is that it is defined by the context in which the consumption occurs – it is made in support of temporary trips outside a person's usual environment. A key task, then, in measuring tourism is to be able to track the portion – and only the portion – of the supply and demand of consumer goods and services associated with tourism trips.

The concept of satellite accounts was introduced in 1991 to the tourism field at the World Tourism Organization's International Conference on Travel and Tourism Statistics in Ottawa, Canada. French statisticians had developed the original concept of satellite accounts as a way of measuring aspects of a national economy not captured in traditional Systems of National Accounts, such as volunteer work and education. Canadian statisticians built on this work, extending the concept to tourism. Statistics Canada published the world's first TSA in 1994.

TSAs are basically a set of definitions and tables that are formulated in a logical way that is consistent with Systems of National Accounts (large matrices that report the economic activity in a nation's industries). When fully developed, TSA tables describe: expenditures on tourism commodities by consumers, reported by domestic, inbound and outbound tourism trips by type of commodity; the value of the production of tourism commodities by type of industry and type of commodity; net value added by tourism activity (contributions to national Gross Domestic Product); jobs created; gross fixed capital formation (the value of investment in assets such as improvements to land, buildings (including second homes), machinery and equipment (including aircraft, cruise vessels, motor coaches, railway coaches and passenger watercraft); expenditures on collective consumption, such as visitor information bureaux, collection of tourism statistics, control and regulation of tourism businesses, visa and passport controls and special civil defence services provided to protect visitors (remember, though, that such spending is not considered as being *tourism* expenditures); and other visitor measures, such as numbers of arrivals and departures, length of stay, visitors' choices of accommodation and modes of transportation, and numbers of firms providing tourism services.

Table 1.3. Tourism ratios, Canada, 2014. (From Statistics Canada, 2014a,b.)

Commodity	Tourism demand (CAN\$, millions)	Total demand (CAN\$, millions)	Tourism ratio (%)
Passenger air transport	19,256	20,246	95.1
Vehicle rental	1,807	2,626	68.8
Vehicle fuel	10,753	49,166	20.9
Accommodation	12,637	13,921	90.8
Food and beverage	12,907	65,160	19.8
Recreation and entertainment	5,438	24,310	22.4
Travel agency services	4,705	4,734	99.4
Convention fees	261	283	92.2

An important implication of UNWTO's definition of tourism is that certain types of expenditures someone might think are tourism are, in fact, not tourism. As, we have seen, the UNWTO definition defines tourism as activities by people on a trip (and certain activities undertaken prior to making a trip, such as buying a tour package). Spending by businesses, governments and other organizations in support of tourism, while very important in making tourism trips possible, is not considered to be tourism spending. Thus, spending by airlines to buy or lease aircraft; by governments to collect tourism statistics or to operate national parks; by airport authorities to build or expand airports; by development companies to build hotels; or by destination-marketing organizations (DMOs) to market tourism are not tourism expenditures. The scope of tourism, as an economic sector, is limited to the activities of visitors. It does not include

spending by businesses or agencies in support of tourism.

A LOOK AT TOURISM RESEARCH

Some general perspectives

Tourism research, as all research, is about asking and answering questions. There are many different types of questions and many ways of answering them. Our focus in this book is on research questions. A research question is characterized by three qualities:

- Research questions involve the creation of new knowledge. If your question can be answered by looking through a book or doing an Internet search, it is not a research question.
- Research questions should be answerable. The answer may be tentative or

incomplete, but it should be possible at least to begin to answer it. Questions arising in philosophy, metaphysics, ethics or religion, such as 'what is the meaning of my life?' are usually not research questions. These can be important questions but they cannot be answered by research. Questions that start with (or imply) 'why...?' often are not research questions. Research questions more typically start with 'how...?', 'how many...?' or 'where...?'.

- Research questions are answered through collecting and analysing data. The answers many people have to questions about the meaning of life and other philosophical issues are not based on the collection and analysis of data. Ideally, the collection and analysis of data should be done and reported in such a way that an independent researcher could replicate your findings – or at least, he or she could follow the logic of how you answered the question.

Research questions may also be contrasted with management questions or problems. Questions that managers often face have very different qualities to research questions. These include the following:

- Management problems tend to be complex, broad issues with multiple facets. As a result, they may not have simple answers.
- Management problems often are not expressed in a way that immediately suggests researchable questions. Indeed, many management problems are not answerable by research. They require other tactics or strategies.
- Management problems are often sparked by a problem, either internally generated

or externally imposed. As a result, managers usually look for solutions that are quick to develop and implement; they are also concerned about the costs of acquiring or implementing the answer to the problem.

- Some solutions to management problems may be financially, socially or politically problematic. Moreover, the implementation of a solution may require moral courage, political connections or a strong base of support within the organization.

For those management questions that can be answered by research, you, as a researcher, need to consider several things. The nature of the management problem must be well understood by both the manager and you, the researcher. You need to be able to reframe the problem as a question research can answer. A valuable skill for any researcher is to be able to help a manager reformulate a general sense of a problem into something that can be addressed in a practical way. The quality of data on which the answer will be developed is essential, but the data and subsequent analysis must be affordable and produced in a timely way. You will find practical guidelines for planning and conducting research projects elsewhere in this book.

Beyond the immediate benefit of answering questions, research can help managers and decision makers in tourism agencies, organizations and businesses base their decisions on empirical information. If seen as credible, research can help a decision maker overcome dysfunctional personal biases and resist political pressure. For example, political officials, especially in smaller jurisdictions, may have personal agendas related to remaining in office or returning political favours that could

lead to marketing decisions that do not adequately meet market demands. For example, sometimes managers are pressured by elected officials to use tourism marketing budgets to reward advertising firms for political support, regardless of the merit of the firms as tourism marketers. Politicians sometimes do not want to cooperate with adjacent jurisdictions either as a matter of ego or out of a misplaced sense of competition, even if visitors do not see the two different jurisdictions as distinct destinations. In other words, market realities may dictate cooperation in tourism marketing – a conclusion that can be gleaned from properly conducted research – but such cooperation has to overcome personal and political biases. Unfortunately, having research data alone does not always allow you to convince someone to change his or her mind if his or her decisions are based on non-empirical criteria. How to cope with bad managerial decisions based on emotions is ultimately not a research question.

A few other challenges faced by some tourism researchers include the following. Some industry practitioners automatically dismiss research as ‘ivory tower’ or not practical for decisions in the real world. This can be true of some academic research, but it is not an accurate characterization of all research. At other times, research will be dismissed as being ‘too general’. In other words, the level of data collection and analysis is done at a high level, such as at a national perspective, and does not reflect local conditions. This is a common problem with research conducted by government agencies. Unfortunately, the only solution to making research more specific or precise is to increase significantly the budget available for larger samples and more detailed analyses. This is rarely an option.

Research is also sometimes criticized as being ‘historic’ or backward-looking. This refers to the fact that much data collection focuses on past behaviour or business experiences. Examining what happened in the past is needed to understand the impacts of tourism, but businesses usually want forward-looking information. They would like answers to questions such as what are the forces that will affect their business success in the coming season. Or, what changes are coming in air capacity to a destination? Or, what is the competition planning for next year?

Types of tourism research

Research can be classified several different ways. Brunt (1997, p. 2), for example, suggests the following classification based on who initiates a project and how the project is managed:

Pure research: research undertaken for academic interest or in the pursuit of a university degree. Its emphasis is on generating knowledge, not solving practical problems. The researcher is in control of the research project, and usually selects the topic solely on the basis of their curiosity. The researcher is normally free to publish the results in a journal or present them at a conference.

Action research: research undertaken to solve practical problems. The research is usually conducted as a partnership between the researcher and a client concerned with the problem. Control of the research project typically is shared between the researcher and the party who will use the results. The subject of research is usually defined by the client; the client also often has control over the release of any results. The project may be initiated by either the researcher or the client.

Consultancy: research commissioned by a client or organization. The researcher may have to compete with other researchers for the project by submitting a formal proposal, and works with the client under terms specified by a legally binding contract. The results are usually never published because such research is often commercially valuable or politically sensitive.

There are two other types of research that can be added to Brunt's list:

Workplace research: research conducted internally by employees of an organization. In this situation, you may be assigned a specific research task, and might work as part of a team. More senior analysts in an organization may identify potential research projects that would be of benefit to their employer and then either do the research themselves or assign it to one of their staff. While some tourism organizations, especially government agencies and larger DMOs, might have job positions labelled as 'researcher' or 'analyst', employees who have other job titles will often be assigned research projects to complete. In other words, 'tourism research' is more likely to be one of many responsibilities you will have on a job rather than have as part of your job title.

'Delay research': this type of research may sound like sarcasm, but it can be a reality. Delay research occurs when a manager is hesitant about making a decision because of the potential consequences or when someone in authority needs to be seen taking action but is uncertain about what to do. In such a circumstance, he might say, 'We need more research.' Certainly, more research is sometimes needed before making a decision, but at other times the decision maker 'just' requires courage and wisdom – not research. If you are

employed as a researcher and you find yourself being directed to undertake research that appears to have the sole purpose of delaying a decision, you have the delicate challenge of discussing the matter with your supervisor and suggesting, if possible, that more time and money spent on research may not be an appropriate action. Research can provide information, but it cannot provide wisdom and courage. However, it can, regrettably, be a delaying tactic.

A different way of classifying research is to look at its functions – the fundamental purposes of research. In this context, 'function' refers to basic perspectives of research rather than the intended application of or motivation for doing research. These basic functions are description, explanation and prediction.

Description: description refers to research that seeks better to identify or measure what exists. The questions asked in descriptive research often use phrases such as 'how many' and 'where'. Although 'descriptive research' is sometimes used as a pejorative phrase, accurate, timely and relevant description is fundamental to most research. Moreover, descriptive research in tourism is not necessarily simple. Even a question as basic as how many people visited your city last year can be difficult to answer accurately.

Explanation: explanatory research is undertaken to understand how a pattern or phenomenon you have described has developed. For example, once you have been able to estimate how many people visited your city, you may want to understand the forces that influence the number of people who come to your city, and the reasons the number increased or decreased from the year before.

Although the distinction between description and explanation appears clear, it

can be fuzzy in practice. For example, if the number of visitors to your city decreased from one year to the next, and you observed that the city's tourism marketing budget had been cut, you might conclude that the budget cuts were the cause of the decline. On the other hand, your attempt to explain the correlation can run deeper than just this simple observation. You might look at the reasons for the marketing budget cutback. Perhaps the budget was cut after the election of city councillors who were hostile to tourism. If so, then the 'real' reason visitor numbers fell was because of a change in municipal politics. But then you might want to look at the reasons for anti-tourism councillors being elected.

The questions about causes could continue in a very long chain. The point here is that an explanation may be viewed simply as a more elaborate form of description. One could spend a long time exploring the links of causes and effects, with each level of explanation viewed as a description.

Prediction: predictive research is the attempt to forecast what will happen in the future (forecasting and prediction can be treated as synonymous, although some researchers use 'prediction' as a general term and limit 'forecasting' to the use of statistical models). Forecasting is a complex task and is largely beyond the scope of this book. However, a few words about basic forecasting approaches will be useful. Forecasting methods may be classified as either empirical (sometimes called quantitative) or subjective (sometimes called qualitative). Frechtling (1996) notes that forecasting tools in empirical forecasting models range from simple extrapolations of past trends (which ignore the causes of change) to more sophisticated statistical modelling that attempts to express the reasons for change as

one or more equations, using historical data to calibrate the equations.

The two important subjective forecasting tools in tourism are the **Delphi method** and **consumer intentions surveys**. These are described as subjective or qualitative methods because they use opinions rather than mathematics to generate forecasts. The Delphi method is a formal, structured process for soliciting the opinions of a panel of experts and working with them to reach a consensus about some aspect of the future. The consumer intentions survey asks a sample of people in some origin market (such as another province or state) about their intentions to visit your destination. The results of a consumer intentions survey are actually statistical tabulations of the opinions of consumers, so they represent a combination of both empirical (quantitative) and subjective (qualitative) approaches. Consumer intentions can be a useful leading indicator of future levels of visitation, although travel intentions are not a very precise predictor of actual visitor levels.

Coming back to the functions of research, some researchers identify a fourth function, **prescription**, also called **action research**. As we have already noted, action research is research undertaken in partnership with a client to solve a specific problem. It can also be referred to as 'prescriptive research' because the objective is to prescribe a solution for some problem. However, it is not truly a function of research in the same sense as description, explanation and prediction. Instead, action research employs one or more of these functions. The primary distinction of action research is that it concludes with a set of recommendations for actions, policies or other things that will solve the problem being

studied. Action research is better thought of as a context for doing research than a distinct function of research.

Still another classification of tourism research reflects basic value perspectives on tourism. This classification system was first proposed by Jafari (2001). He describes his classifications as four platforms for doing research. These platforms represent a form of an intellectual history of perspectives on tourism. As such, the emergence of these different perspectives can also be envisioned as a type of debate about how to study tourism.

Advocacy platform: this type of research is done by researchers who see tourism as a positive force, particularly as a contributor to the economy of a destination, and undertake research to help further the benefits of tourism. This work focuses on questions related to measuring the economic benefits of tourism, or identifying new product opportunities or markets for a destination to pursue. This type of research usually involves description, explanation and some forecasting.

Cautionary platform: eventually, researchers began to be aware of the negative effects of tourism. Their work raises cautions or questions about the costs of tourism. These costs are not necessarily financial (although they can be); rather, they refer to environmental or social problems created by tourism in a destination or, more generally, as a form of international trade. This type of research, too, usually involves description, explanation and some forecasting.

Adaptancy platform: the debates between the proposition or thesis that tourism is a 'passport' to growth (advocacy platform) and its antithesis of tourism as a source of social and environmental problems (cautionary

platform) led to the development of a 'synthesis' – the third platform, adaptancy. Researchers working from the viewpoint of this platform acknowledge that tourism offers both benefits and imposes costs. Their work concentrates on how to optimize benefits while either avoiding or ameliorating the costs. This type of research typically is action research, prescribing strategies to achieve the goals desired by the client or seen as important by the researcher.

Science platform: the most recent platform to have emerged is the 'science' (sometimes called the 'knowledge') platform. This type of research is usually empirical (a term we will discuss later in this chapter) and politically neutral. Tourism is looked at as a phenomenon worthy of study in its own right, and not necessarily as a force to be promoted, thwarted or controlled. Examples of this type of work include efforts to develop more precise measures of the magnitude of tourism – visitors, jobs and so on – in a destination without the judgement of whether the number is too high or too low.

THINKING ABOUT THINKING: SOME BASIC DEFINITIONS

The previous section described different ways of classifying research and different contexts in which research is done. We will now look at how researchers think – how they look at the world, frame their questions and organize their thoughts. Let us start with a few definitions. Our look at the following terms will be brief, just to introduce you to some key ideas about each term. Entire books have been written about each of these, exploring the concepts in great detail.

Induction and deduction

Researchers generally use two broad types of logic in their work. Induction (or inductive reasoning) is arguably the most common. It refers to the collection of specific pieces of information or the observation of specific events, from which general conclusions are derived. Induction tends to be open-ended in that it is exploratory, with the conclusions emerging only as the research unfolds.

Deduction begins with a set of concepts or models that suggest testable hypotheses or predictions. The hypotheses are then tested or the predictions made, and the results assessed to confirm or reject the hypotheses or the accuracy of the forecast.

Induction and deduction appear to be opposites; indeed, the 'feel' of the logic of each is quite different. However, induction and deduction are part of a cycle of research. You might begin collecting specific information on some tourism phenomenon that eventually allows you to create a model or to make a statement about some general processes regarding the phenomenon (inductive reasoning). These statements can then be formulated as hypotheses for further testing (deductive reasoning). The results of the deductive process might then lead you into further inductive research to further refine your ideas, which can then be retested. Induction and deduction thus become part of a cycle that, you hope, will lead to greater and more accurate insights into some tourism phenomenon.

Models

Tourism researchers frequently use models to describe how they believe some aspect of tourism operates or functions. These models may be mathematical in the form of a set of

interrelated equations, but more commonly they are graphic – often a drawing with boxes and lines connecting the boxes, although other types of graphic presentations are possible. Models have a number of characteristics that affect their usefulness in tourism research.

Models simplify. They are a way of representing some tourism entity, function or phenomenon in a way that the essential features can be easily grasped. However, this simplification means that models are incomplete. Including every detail and permutation of a real-world tourism phenomenon would make the model impossible to use for research. The value of simplification can be seen in, for example, Butler's (1980) resort life cycle model (see [Fig. 1.2](#)) that describes how resort areas rise and decline. The model is basically a classic growth curve such as that originally developed in biology – an S-shaped curve on a standard x - y graph, where the y -axis represents the number of visitors and the x -axis represents time. Different stretches along the curve are associated with different types of tourist, from explorers to mass market. The model does not include many other variables that could be important in understanding the evolution of destinations, such as total revenues, visitor satisfaction, resort profitability and various impact measures.

The model has been used by many researchers who have found it a useful conceptual tool because the model is simple and permits modification or adaptation. This is another characteristic of models – they can be easily modified. In the case of the resort life cycle model, researchers are free to use whatever time frame (the x -axis) makes sense to them. Similarly, researchers can use whatever scale of visitor numbers on the y -axis they choose, or

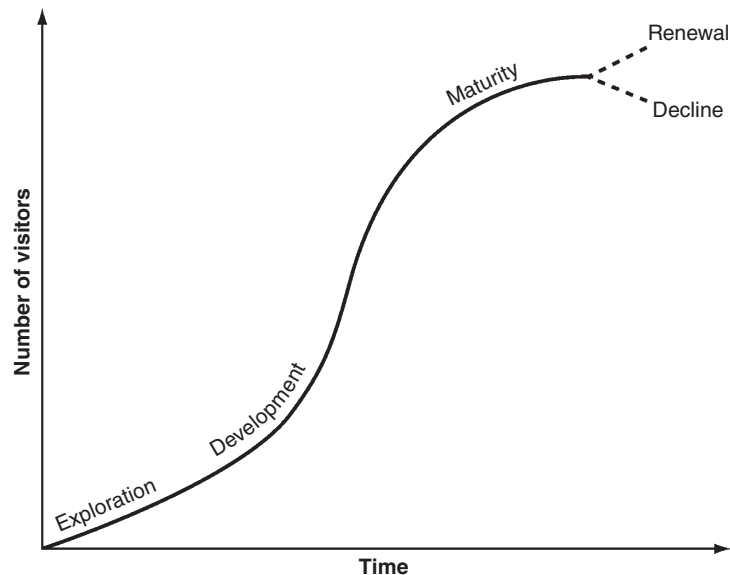


Fig. 1.2. The resort life cycle model.

even change the *y*-axis to profitability or some other characteristic. The precise shape of the curve is also not specified, permitting further experimentation and modification.

In brief, models allow you to describe some aspect of tourism clearly, and to play with ways of changing your description to explore alternative structures or relationships.

Hypotheses

The word hypothesis sometimes is used casually to mean speculation, but in research it has a more formal meaning. It refers to a statement of a possible relationship between variables that is formulated for testing. This proposed relationship is based on previous research findings or on a relationship suggested by a model. When hypotheses are subject to statistical testing, they are often (but not always) worded as a 'null hypothesis'; that is, they are worded to state the suggestion that there is no relationship between the two variables. This may sound perverse, but there is

a logic here, based on the concept of error. In the case of hypothesis testing, there are two types of error: Type I and Type II. These are not very descriptive names, so they are better described in the following way.

A **Type I error** is a false positive. In other words, you conclude something is true when, in fact, it is not. For example, if a woman takes a home pregnancy test and the test indicates she is pregnant, but she really is not – that's a false positive. A **Type II error** is a false negative – the conclusion that something is not true when, in fact, it is. If a man goes in for a paternity test and the test indicates he is not the father, but in fact, he is – that's a false negative.

Researchers generally want to avoid a Type I error more than a Type II error. If you are going to make an error in testing a hypothesis, it is usually safer if you conclude there is no relationship even when there is one, than to conclude a relationship exists when, in fact, it does not. Stating your hypotheses as

null hypotheses minimizes your chances of making a Type I error. In other words, you are more likely to conclude there is no particular pattern or relationship in the data you are studying when there is one, than to conclude that a relationship exists when one does not exist. (You may need to read this paragraph a couple of times to think that point through!)

Statistical tests for null hypotheses are given thresholds of **probability** to minimize the chances that what we conclude from the test is due to accident. Tourism researchers traditionally work with a probability of 0.05 (or one chance in 20). There is nothing special about using 0.05 – it is just tradition. Some researchers choose to be more conservative and use a threshold of 0.01 – one chance in 100. The choice depends on how serious the results of any errors would be. For tourism marketing, for example, the chance of one-in-20 error is probably quite acceptable. However, in the case of testing a new drug, a one-in-20 chance that a new drug causes cancer is unacceptably high.

Theory

Theory is a word with many different definitions. In academe, the term usually has the connotation of something of broad importance. However, in practice, the word is often used vaguely or loosely by tourism researchers. In fact, it is used in so many different ways that – unless a writer/speaker carefully defines the term – you may not be certain how the word is being used or whether the word means anything at all (Smith *et al.*, 2013).

In the natural sciences, a theory is a formal, explicit description of some aspect of reality that has been determined to provide repeatable and falsifiable (testable) predictions. The purposes of a theory are both to

explain how a phenomenon functions and to make predictions about unknown aspects of that phenomenon. Scientific theories are subject to revisions as new data become available or when a prediction logically based on the theory repeatedly fails.

Calling something a theory in the scientific tradition does not mean that the set of propositions is only hypothetical or speculative. Rather, a theory has been rigorously tested and provides accurate predictions. The propositions may continue to be called a theory for years because scientists understand that they can never be 100% certain about the accuracy of their propositions. However, it is incorrect to think that if something is ‘only’ a theory, it has questionable accuracy. A theory typically builds on pre-existing theories, although it may replace those earlier theories; it is supported by many lines of interconnected evidence, often incorporating other theories. Scientists developing theories try to keep the theory as parsimonious – simple – as possible while still explaining the phenomenon being studied. This latter point is known as ‘**Occam’s razor**’ test. Occam was a 14th century logician who proposed that any explanation of a phenomenon should make as few assumptions and be as simple as possible. This is sometimes expressed as the notion that if several explanations of a phenomenon are possible, the simplest one is probably the correct one.

The word ‘theory’, as noted, though, is used in many other ways. In mathematics, it refers to a set of definitions, axioms (self-evident truths or assumptions), theorems (propositions that have been proved true through deductive logic) and techniques that are related to each other such as game theory or network theory. In the arts, it refers

to a set of accepted principles guiding how the arts should be created or expressed, such as music theory. Social scientists often use the term to refer to thinking that reflects a systematic logic that includes a set of principles and a conceptual model describing how various phenomena relate to each other, regardless of whether these relationships are supported by empirical evidence. The term is sometimes used to mean what might be better described as ideology in the sense of a set of beliefs and values, as in ‘feminist theory’. Grounded theory, a term that first appeared in psychology, is not a theory in any of these senses discussed here, but refers to a research method (more about this later).

‘Theory’ is also used to refer to a set of beliefs based on experience that someone believes to represent a valid interpretation of past events, such as ‘I’m offering lower prices in the shoulder season on the theory that visitors like a bargain’. Or, even more casually, ‘theory’ refers to a conjecture made without adequate evidence, which is virtually the opposite of how scientists use the term. [Table 1.4](#) summarizes a typology of the uses of the term ‘theory’ in tourism research, based on a review of articles referring to theory in the three leading tourism, hospitality and leisure studies journals. It may be tempting to conclude that the word ‘theory’ has no meaning. As you can see, however, the problem is that the word has too many meanings. Whenever you hear or read someone using the word ‘theory’, try to get a sense of how the user is defining the term. This book will generally avoid the use of ‘theory’ because of the lack of precision in its denotation. If you want to use the word, I suggest limiting it to theories of either Type 1 or Type 2. Words like model, concept, paradigm, research design, method

or epistemology are clearer and more precise terms that should be used for the five other types of ‘theory’.

THINKING ABOUT THINKING: RESEARCH PARADIGMS

Researchers approach their work from a number of different perspectives, which they usually call paradigms (these are sometime referred to as ‘philosophies’). Different paradigms reflect different assumptions about the nature of reality and the processes of how people comprehend reality. ‘Paradigm’ has been defined as ‘a set of shared beliefs among a group of researchers’ (Robson, 2011, p. 27). Trying to understand the essence of alternative paradigms and how they relate to or differ from each other is often a bane of students in a research design class. There are several reasons for this, including academic debates about the definitions and differences in some paradigms and sometimes arcane vocabulary by authors discussing their favourite paradigm.

This confusion can result in some unfortunate consequences such as (according to some of my own students) a belief that the debates are purely ‘academic’ and of no practical value to the practice of research and that time spent on thinking about paradigms is wasted. While I can understand, even appreciate, their frustrations, having a basic understanding of the key issues and assumptions of various paradigms is essential for any student who truly needs to understand the practice of tourism research. The following discussion provides only a very brief overview of some of the more important paradigms used in tourism research that will give you at least an

Table 1.4. A typology of 'theory' in tourism.

Category	Brief description	Additional comments
Theory of the first type	'Traditional' theory of the form found in economics or the natural sciences	Type 1 theory is based on substantial empirical evidence and integrated with other theories that address connected phenomena. It is based on falsifiable hypotheses. Generally, only one theory can exist at any one time. The repeated failure of hypotheses derived from a theory indicates the theory is probably false and needs to be refined or replaced. However, this type of theory has declined significantly in tourism research
Theory of the second type	Theory is synonymous with an a priori, usually empirical, model	Type 2 theory is also based on substantial empirical evidence, but may or may not be integrated with other theories that address connected phenomena. It, too, is based on falsifiable hypotheses. Multiple theories describing the same phenomena may exist simultaneously
Theory of the third type	Theory is equated with statistical analysis	Type 3 theory is a statistical model used for description, explanation or prediction. However, the model is ad hoc – not tied to or based on an explicit, formal conceptual foundation or theory – nor is it integrated with a larger conceptual framework. These theories typically produce falsifiable hypotheses. This type of theory would be better labelled 'model'
Theory of the fourth type	Theory is an untested/ untestable verbal or graphic model	Type 4 theory is similar to Type 2 theory in that it represents a conceptual model used for description or explanation. It differs from Type 2 theory, however, in that the models are not or cannot be expressed in ways that are falsifiable. They tend to be verbal, but may also be supported by graphic representations. This type of theory, too, would be better labelled 'model' or 'concept'

Theory of the fifth type	Epistemology as theory	Type 5 theory is a formally articulated way of looking at the world that lacks falsifiable hypotheses. It presents propositions that shape the type of questions asked, information collected and how observations are interpreted. However, such research is ultimately subjective and cannot be independently verified. This type of theory should be labelled 'epistemology', 'paradigm' or 'research design', not 'theory'
Theory of the sixth type	Grounded theory	Type 6 theory involves the derivation of themes arising from a structured, sequential, subjective coding of interview transcripts. Findings of this grounded theory cannot be generalized beyond the specific context of the research. Different researchers observing the same phenomena may come to very different conclusions, based on their personal world views. This approach should be referred to as sequential or iterative coding, not as theory
Theory of the seventh type	Theory as an ungrounded label or adjective	Type 7 theory represents the invocation of the word 'theory' without any further development, articulation or linkage to existing theory. No falsifiable statements, propositions or hypotheses are developed, nor is an a priori model used to guide data collection or analysis. Empirical results may be presented, although these usually are descriptive only and do not reflect any deeper model or insights. This use of 'theory' is the fastest growing usage in tourism research, perhaps because of the increasing pressure on researchers to position their work as contributing to 'theory'

introduction to some of the key perspectives and issues associated with each. There is a very large body of literature on each that explores their strengths and weaknesses, nuances, applications, competing conceptualizations and historical evolution. Indeed, some scholars' primary activity is critiquing and debating paradigms rather than actually collecting and analysing data.

Three notions are central to any research paradigm. The first is **epistemology**. Epistemology is derived from the Greek word '*episteme*', or 'knowing'. In other words, epistemology is the philosophical inquiry into how we come to know things. The second notion is **ontology**. It is derived from the Greek '*onto*' (philosophers and social scientists like to create words based on Greek origins because it makes the concepts sound more scholarly), which means 'being'. Ontology is the philosophy of the nature of reality. Epistemology and ontology are distinct concepts but clearly related. Together, they describe how we come to know something as well as the nature of that 'something'. The third notion is **methodology**, which – not surprisingly – comes from the Greek '*methodus*', or 'pursuit'. Methodology refers to the study of the procedures used to collect and interpret information on some subject. It also is used to refer directly to the tools or procedures – the methods – a researcher uses. (Some authors appear to prefer 'methodology' as a word over 'method' because it is a bigger word – a phenomenon I call syllabic inflation.)

Perhaps the most common way of classifying research paradigms is by labelling them as either quantitative or qualitative. The distinction is often viewed as one emphasizing methods. An example of a quantitative method is a closed-ended survey – a survey that presents

respondents with printed questions accompanied by boxes representing possible answers to be ticked. The data would then be analysed using statistical tests. An example of a qualitative method is an in-depth personal interview – a conversation between a researcher and a subject during which the researcher poses questions, probes answers and explores for meanings and deeper insights into what the subject is saying. The analysis of the meaning of the interview is done through mental processes shaped by a systematic look at the content of the transcript of the interview.

The terms quantitative and qualitative, however, can be misleading. Quantitative methods are used to study qualities such as a subject's attitudes through the use of Likert scaling (which we will look at later in this book). Qualitative methods may be used to collect quantitative data such as the number of times a person used a given adjective or espoused a particular attitude in an interview. Not only is the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research often imprecise, but many researchers who identify themselves as belonging to one school or the other see the nature of the distinction differently. Some qualitative researchers view the distinction as being more about epistemology and ontology than methodology. They see the distinction as being about how researchers believe they can come to know something and about how they perceive the nature of reality rather than about the technical details of the methods they use. Some colleagues describe themselves as 'qualitative researchers' and see the most fundamental concern in doing research as selecting and being able to defend a particular epistemological paradigm, rather than selecting an important question to be answered.

On the other hand, many quantitative researchers – although not all – view the differences as simply being about methods. Their focus tends to be more on technical details of methods and tools used to answer questions than on philosophical musings of the deeper roots of the various paradigms. They (as I do) view the fundamental concern in research as the identification of and effort used to answer an important question.

These distinctions are often not that critical for actually conducting practical research, although they can be interesting if you want to understand more about the philosophy of science. In this book, we will be more concerned with choosing appropriate methods to answer different types of questions. Moreover, we will use the terms ‘**empiricism**’ (or ‘**empirical**’) and ‘**subjective**’, instead of ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’.

Empiricism

The word empiricism is, as you might have anticipated, derived from the Greek. In this case, the word is ‘*empeiria*’, or experience. Philosophers have written extensively on different types, nuances and assumptions of empiricism; simply put, empiricism refers to the use of observation or experience to gain knowledge. It is based on the belief that there is an objective, knowable reality that exists outside the researcher’s mind. In other words, the brick wall you see in front of you is not just in your imagination, but is real. Empirical research involves the systematic observation and recording of data that are then studied to form conclusions.

These conclusions can be descriptions of some pattern, the development of explanations about the forces creating that pattern (recall our discussion earlier about the fuzzy

distinction between description and explanation) or the making and testing of predictions about how the pattern will change in the future. Inductive reasoning is a common logic in empirical research. You begin by collecting data; you then analyse it and reach some conclusions. However, deduction can be used, too. For example, you might have a restaurant location model that predicts fast-food restaurants will cluster near busy intersections in cities and near busy exits/entrances along limited-access expressways. You collect data on restaurant locations from a number of cities to test whether your model is accurate. In this case, you began with a belief or hypothesis and then test it by collecting data – which is the essence of deductive logic.

There are many empirical methods. Surveys are one of the most common. Other empirical methods include field research (such as observing the locations of restaurants), the analysis of secondary data (such as analysing hotel registration records) or conducting experiments (such as testing alternative landscape designs to minimize fertilizer runoff into water bodies). An important characteristic of empirical methods is that the data, analysis and results are, in principle, available for anyone to verify independently or replicate. They are also ‘self-correcting’ in the sense that, if you have an expectation about the results of a research project, empirical methods will indicate whether your expectations or predictions were wrong. Empirical research, though, cannot prove you are right. An example may make this clearer.

Assume you have developed a model that predicts the relationship between expenditures on marketing by a destination and the number of visitors who will come to that destination. You observe that a DMO decreases

its marketing budget by 20% and your model predicts visitation will fall by 15% a year later. You collect data on the number of visitors a year after the budget cut. If you find that the number of visitors remained stable or even rose, you have to conclude there is something wrong about your model. On the other hand, if the number of visitors fell by 15%, you may feel gratified your prediction was accurate. However, you cannot be certain that it was because the model is accurate or whether it is due to a coincidence. If you continue to test your model with subsequent years of data, and your predictions continue to be borne out, you have growing confidence that the model is correct, but there is no guarantee that you might not simply be observing a series of fortunate coincidences.

In many circumstances, the results of a test will not be clear-cut. In this example, we assumed your model predicted a drop of 15%, but what if you observed a drop of 8%? Is that difference enough to conclude that the model is not accurate? In a field as complex and volatile as tourism marketing, there must be tolerance for a degree of error in forecasting; the magnitude of acceptable error is a matter of professional judgement. However, repeated attempts to make a prediction that turns out to be dramatically wrong must lead you to conclude that there is a problem with your model.

On the other hand, researchers are sometimes tempted to make too much of insignificant but suggestive differences in data, especially when working with relatively small samples. For example, you might have a hypothesis that proposes a relationship between two variables such as: the size of a destination's planning budget will be positively correlated with the profitability of tourism firms

operating in the destination. You collect data from 12 destinations and compare the average level of profitability of tourism firms in the destination with the largest planning budgets against the combined average of profitability and the average planning budget of the 11 other destinations. You find a positive correlation whose statistical significance is 0.10 (compared with the usual criterion of 0.05). You really believe that the more money spent on planning, the greater the profitability of tourism firms. You might be tempted to change the level of significance to 0.10 to be able to claim your hypothesis is supported. Some researchers will do just that, on the grounds that their sample is so small that an 'overly stringent' statistical test is 'unfair' for a small sample.

Lowering your standards in a case like this is ultimately an ethical judgement in an ambiguous situation. At least in this case, you might try other tests, such a regression where you plot budgets against profits in a graph so you can see a trend line across all 12 destinations. Or you compare the means of budget and profit across the quartiles (the average profitability of the three destinations with the highest levels of profitability versus the second best performing set of destinations, then the third, and so on). If some of the other tests confirm your hypothesis, you might be justified in arguing the support of your hypothesis. Otherwise, perhaps you should be more conservative and modest and conclude there is no evidence.

The fact that different statistical tests can yield conflicting results is well known to statisticians. This fact is behind the cynical suggestions that 'there are liars, damn liars and then there are statisticians'. When I hear this sentiment voiced, I point out that I believe these

three categories are mutually exclusive and that I am a statistician – so I ask the person making the assertion, ‘Which are you?’.

Taleb (2007) offers some deeper and more pointed commentary on the wisdom of empiricism and the risk of doing research that cannot be tested. In his book, *The Black Swan*, he tells the story about how, prior to around AD 1600, European ornithologists believed all swans were white. Every swan they saw was white, so they had no reason to doubt their belief that all swans are white. Then, when Australia was discovered, the early explorers saw black swans. For those people who cared about bird plumage, this was a shock. It took only one black swan to prove the belief that all swans are white to be wrong.

The point of this story is that knowledge you reach through empirical research is fundamentally asymmetrical. It can prove you are wrong; it cannot prove you are correct. Any positive result might be a matter of luck, and future evidence may reveal that your model or conclusions are incorrect. It may not sound like it, but this ability to prove yourself wrong is a key advantage of empirical research. Being able to learn whether your ideas, conclusions or models are wrong protects you and others from acting on erroneous ideas. In other words, it helps keep you from making a Type I – false positive – error. This is a particular advantage of empirical approaches over subjective approaches. In an age of increasing accountability as well as of growing demands for evidence-based practice (Melnik and Fineout-Overholt, 2005), tourism researchers need to be sure their findings can be properly evaluated and not lead their clients or supervisors into making bad decisions.

It must be acknowledged that empirical paradigms do not provide answers to all the

questions that policy makers and decision makers might seek. Questions about the history of some aspect of tourism require data drawn from personal recollections, interpretations and selected evidence – all of which are subjective. Understanding the story of how a concept evolved, whether it concerns definitions of tourism, a policy or proposed legislation, cannot be told using purely empirical evidence. Understanding how someone emotionally responds to an advertisement or interprets a tourism experience ultimately involves subjective interpretation by both the subject and the researcher. Assessing social impacts of tourism also depends heavily on subjective methods, in that personal experiences of residents as well as visitors should be considered.

Thus, empiricism has its limits, and those limits not only include the possibility of ambiguous results or inconclusive data drawn from small samples but, more importantly, the inability to provide answers to some questions marketers, policy makers, planners and other decision makers would like to have. This is why subjective paradigms are important in tourism research. You will often find, in practice, that many research problems require a combination of empirical and subjective methods. Rather than positioning oneself as an empiricist or as a follower of one of the subjective paradigms, many researchers are pragmatists, using whatever combination of methods helps answer their questions.

Subjective paradigms

Subjective paradigms are based on the notion that reality is personally defined by the subject and/or the researcher, rather than on an objective reality that can be perceived by different observers who would agree on the nature of that reality. These paradigms reflect

the personal values of the researcher and employ data collection methods and, especially, analytical processes that are not necessarily observable by someone other than the researcher. A key difference between empirical and subjective paradigms is in the types of questions that are asked. Putting it somewhat too simply, empiricists typically ask questions about how, where, when and how many; subjective researchers often ask questions about why or what it means.

The terms and classifications used to describe different types of subjective paradigms are diverse, sometimes to the point of being contradictory. You can often find, within any given paradigm, philosophical debates about assumptions, definitions, processes and terminology. Thus, the following description is only one possible description of these paradigms.

Grounded theory: as noted previously, grounded theory is not ‘theory’ in a scientific sense, but a systematic method designed to lead a researcher into conclusions based on the collection and systematic coding of subjective data. The method is still evolving, being first articulated by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. It is sometimes known as the ‘constant comparative method’, reflecting the role of continual comparison of observations with previous observations by the researcher.

The basic idea behind the grounded theory method is that the researcher systematically collects data, primarily but not necessarily just through interviews. Observations are compared and coded as the researcher collects more and more data, eventually ‘revealing’ patterns that make sense to the researcher. These patterns are ultimately stated as ‘theory’, which may be either a general statement of patterns and processes (which could then be subjected to testing by someone

else) or a statement specific to the situation being studied. The patterns or processes that are identified by the researcher are described as ‘emergent’, meaning that they gradually form in the mind of the researcher and evolve with increasing data and study.

Although Glaser and Strauss jointly created the grounded theory approach, they eventually split over details of the method. The split continues to generate debate among practitioners of the method. The gist of the debate concerns whether the categories into which observations are placed are well defined at the outset, perhaps based on existing literature on a topic (Strauss’s approach), or whether they emerge through constant comparison and examination of the data being collected (Glaser’s approach).

One of the central principles of Glaser’s approach is that ‘all is data’ (Glaser, 2001). A researcher should use whatever information that becomes available relevant to his or her subject. Thus, you might use not only interviews, but articles, books, conference presentations, comments by experts, Internet sources, newspaper articles, even television shows or radio talk programmes. Indeed, even empirical data sources might be useful. In this view, the grounded theory approach is not limited to just qualitative data. However, it is still fundamentally a subjective paradigm in that the analysis and emergence of patterns, general processes and other findings are based on your intuition. Properly done, a grounded theory approach should help ensure your interpretations are shaped by data, and the emerging patterns are tested against new information. Still, because so much of the method is based on interpretation rather than empirical analysis, grounded theory is subject to the narrative fallacy (see [Focus Box 1.2](#)).

Focus Box 1.2. Narrative fallacies and confirmation errors.

Nassim Taleb (2007), in his book, *The Black Swan*, describes two risks for researchers working in what he calls 'the narrative disciplines' – what we describe in this book as subjective paradigms: the narrative fallacy and the confirmation error.

The **narrative fallacy** refers to the tendency of people to impose a story on a series of observations to make sense out of them. The story need not be true, nor do the facts need to be related to each other. People like a story to help them remember or understand what they are seeing or hearing. This tendency has been demonstrated by psychologists, and is sometimes referred to as post hoc rationalization. This phenomenon refers to the tendency for people to look for an explanation for some experience, even though the explanation they may offer is not correct. For example, Nisbett and Wilson (1977) presented a group of female subjects with 12 pairs of stockings, asking which they preferred and why. Texture and colour were among the most common reasons given by the women to explain their preferences. In fact, all the stockings were identical. The subjects apparently felt, in response to the researchers' questions, the need to: (i) express preferences; and (ii) justify those preferences. The subjects provided 'explanations', even though those explanations were false.

Stories simplify; they help us make sense of myriad facts so that those facts are easier to recall and to form into a pattern we can understand. Consider the following two statements: 'My boyfriend and I went on vacation last summer. We got engaged last summer'. Now consider the single statement: 'My boyfriend and I went on vacation last summer and got engaged'. There is no additional information in the second statement but it adds a narrative element, a story that links the two statements. The second statement seems much more meaningful, more informative, even though it adds no additional empirical information. It suggests a story that is easier to remember than two independent facts. This is the origin of the narrative fallacy. We create stories to make sense of a series of observations, whether or not those observations are logically linked.

Confirmation error is the tendency for a researcher to see only evidence that confirms his or her beliefs or models, and to ignore evidence that disproves them. It also refers to the belief that the absence of contrary evidence proves the conclusions. To illustrate this point, Taleb uses the example of a turkey being fattened for dinner on the American holiday, Thanksgiving (turkey is the traditional protein served on that holiday). For the first 1000 days of the turkey's life, the turkey is nurtured and fed by a farmer raising it for the dinner table. The turkey comes to believe the farmer raising her has only her happiness and well-being in his heart. Every day that goes along only confirms the turkey's belief in the goodness of her caregiver. However, on the day before Thanksgiving, 'something unexpected will happen to the turkey: it will incur a revision of belief' (Taleb, 2007, p. 40). Thus, despite 1000 observations 'proving' that the farmer had the turkey's best interests at heart, it took only one contrary example to prove the turkey's belief in the kindness of the farmer being wrong.

(Continued)

Focus Box 1.2. Continued.

Here's another example of a different form the confirmation error may take. I had a graduate student who was interested in understanding how seniors differed from younger people in their motivations and experiences associated with cruise vacations. He interviewed seniors and analysed their answers in great detail, developing a story that illustrated all the ways in which he felt seniors acted differently and had different reactions to cruising than other passengers. These differences were based on personal observations the student had made in his own life. Although he concluded seniors had distinctive motives, expectations and experiences with cruising, he never interviewed non-seniors to determine their motivations, expectations and experiences. He had approached his research with a preconceived set of expectations about how his conclusions would turn out and never bothered to look for data that might negate his beliefs. As a result, he ultimately had to rewrite his conclusions so that they addressed only his subjects and not extend them to making inferences about people he had never interviewed.

The style of data interpretation that interprets findings to support a predetermined set of conclusions – a temptation found in both empirical as well as subjective research, although it is more prevalent in subjective research – has been cynically described by Gelman and Weakliem (2009, p. 315) as analysis that is 'more "vampirical" than "empirical" – [conclusions] unable to be killed by mere evidence'.

A couple of important principles in *all* research are: (i) keep an open mind – avoid preforming conclusions that may bias your results; and (ii) actively look for counter-examples to your findings – try to find evidence that suggests your preliminary conclusions are incorrect. Being open to having your ideas proved wrong may be uncomfortable, but it is essential in any credible research.

Interpretism: this paradigm emphasizes the belief that 'reality', at least in the sense of meaning and understanding, is constructed in the mind of individuals. This paradigm is sometimes called **constructivism** or **constructionism** (we'll briefly look at the differences between these terms shortly). At one level, the idea that each of us may have our own interpretation of events is common-sense understanding. Most of us understand that different people can have different interpretations of the same event, and that the meanings we invest in some experiences are

our own interpretations. Interpretists sometimes describe this as 'multiple realities'.

Interpretists are interested in asking questions about how other people create meaning of events and what those meanings are. The questions may focus on the individual, such as exploring the meanings of a vacation trip to each member of a family. Or the researcher may be interested in how society constructs shared meanings of some phenomenon. For example, a researcher might explore how different groups interpret 'tourism' as a concept and what forces gave

rise to different interpretations. The term ‘constructionism’ is sometimes used to refer to this broader, more social perspective while ‘constructivism’ is sometimes used to refer to the focus on the individual. Other researchers use the two terms synonymously.

Interpretists believe they must get to know their subjects well and be emotionally immersed in their research. They generally do not accept the desirability of keeping themselves, their values or their perceptions distinct from the subject they are studying. Interpretists usually make their values and perspectives explicit as part of their research. Because they view (to varying degrees of literalness) that there is no objective reality, interpretists emphasize written or spoken words – discourse – as the source of knowledge. Language is seen not just as a communication tool for conveying information about reality, but as reality itself.

At the most radical level, some interpretists even deny objective reality. Examples of this perspective can be found in writers such as Foucault (1972), who asserted that discourse (language) ‘constructs’ the very objects it considers, or Derrida (1976, p. 158), who claims that ‘there is nothing outside of the text’. This is an extreme position that leads to absurd assertions if accepted literally. Even radical interpretists go to conferences or go on vacation. When doing so, they do not deny the existence of the audience to whom they are speaking or the materiality of the aircraft on which they fly. Bradley (1998, p. 68) describes the position of the radical interpretists (a position he rejects) in the following way: ‘Talk about the mind is viewed as an artefact of cultural forces, an epiphenomenon shaped by the conventions of discourse. Discourse is real. Everything else is relative to discourse.’

These radical interpretists are sometimes known as ‘subjectivists’.

A more reasonable position is to view interpretism not as a statement about reality (ontology), but about how we come to understand the world (epistemology). In other words, a moderate interpretist would emphasize that much of what we understand about the world occurs through language. Language allows us to comprehend and communicate meaning, but there is still an objective reality beyond language. For example, that many people take temporary trips away from home is an objective reality; which of those trips we label as ‘tourism’ is a socially constructed concept. Furthermore, the reasons for those trips and their meaning to the traveller are personally constructed concepts. The distinction between meaning (sometimes called ‘truth’) and reality (‘facts’) was explained to me by my doctoral supervisor during an intense philosophical discussion over a pint in this way: ‘Steve, whatever is still there after you stop believing in it, is reality.’

One of the weaknesses of the interpretist approach is that much of the data and analysis cannot be reliably tested by an independent researcher. Indeed, it is difficult even for the original researcher to avoid being influenced by his or her own beliefs and assumptions, to ensure that the conclusions are accurate and not shaped by subconscious assumptions or beliefs. Interpretists, perhaps even more than grounded theorists, are vulnerable to both the narrative fallacy and confirmation error (see [Focus Box 1.2](#)).

On a practical level, interpretist research is time-consuming and typically based on small samples. This means that it is not easy to apply to or to generalize to larger populations. The insights from an interpretist

approach may be quite revelatory or provocative, but there is no guarantee that they apply to anyone other than the individuals interviewed. Interpretist research, with its focus on individual interpretations, may miss the impact of larger social forces, especially if the subject is not conscious of the impact of those forces on him- or herself.

Critical theory: this paradigm is not really a theory, either, but a view of the world that sees society in terms of conflict, inequity and power struggles. This belief in the primacy of oppression in social relations is an example of a broader social force that an interpretist might miss if the subject accepts his oppression as ‘that’s just the way life is’. Critical theorists also believe that people are capable, creative and have substantial potential but that some people oppress others, blocking them from achieving their potential. Critical theory research seeks to uncover examples and the causes of oppression or social injustice. More than that, critical theory is a form of action research that is intended to empower people to promote what the critical theorist interprets as a more egalitarian society. Critical theory that focuses on gender relations from a woman’s perspective is known as feminist research.

While an interpretist sees that personal values influence how she will interpret what she hears from her subjects and thus will make their values explicit, a critical theorist will be driven by these values. Those values will shape the researcher’s motivations and direct her research activities as well as her conclusions. Evidence will be selected and interpreted by the researcher to reveal ‘the truth’ of oppression. Once ‘the truth’ is known, the critical

theorist then moves her findings into action to help individuals change their situation.

Because critical theory research presumes that social relations are driven by power struggles and inequalities, all observations are interpreted in light of this viewpoint. In other words, even more than with interpretism, critical theory research is not only subjective but biased towards a predetermined conclusion. Either only evidence that supports the conclusion of social inequality (or the proposed actions to redress inequality) will be reported, or it will be reinterpreted to support a foregone conclusion. Critical theorists thus are especially vulnerable to confirmation error, seeing only evidence that supports their beliefs and ignoring or reinterpreting evidence that contradicts those beliefs.

Critical theory research may be driven more by the researcher’s personal agenda for political action than a desire truly to better understand social patterns. Because a key feature of critical theory research is to plot out an action agenda, research will be conducted to guide and support a plan of action to implement social change. A risk in critical theory is that the direction of social change and the strategy to implement it will be determined not so much by empirical, fact-based research (the existence of which critical theorists deny is possible) as by a personal, subjective political agenda.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of tourism is fascinating and challenging. Tourism is a topic with many

different faces, and that can be studied from many different perspectives. Tourism research is virtually always based on a definition of tourism that may either be spelled out or left implicit. Regardless, it is important for you to understand how an author defines tourism when you read someone else's work and to be conscious of your own definition when you do research.

Similarly, it is important to understand that tourism can be studied from a number of disciplines (economics, geography, planning and sociology, to name a few) as well as with different paradigms. Each paradigm has its own set of values, assumptions and ways of viewing the world. These can be broadly categorized as either empirical or subjective. Empirical paradigms focus on observable data and the findings can generally be tested to determine whether or not they are erroneous. There are two key limitations in empirical research. First, empiricism cannot prove you are right – only that you are wrong (hence the use of the term 'falsifiable' rather than 'verifiable' when referring to testing empirical findings). Positive findings may be overturned with the collection of additional data at some time in the future. Second, empirical research generally does not allow probing into meanings, values and the deeper nature of tourism experiences. Questions about meanings, symbolism and values require subjective approaches. These approaches, though, also have limitations, such as susceptibility to the narrative fallacy and confirmation error.

Tourism research is a social phenomenon. The collection of data often involves talking with other people, and perhaps

working with other researchers. Even when a researcher works alone and uses secondary data sources, he will eventually share the results with other people. Tourism researchers typically develop extensive networks, often internationally, as we collaborate with and communicate with other researchers. In addition to personal communications, we communicate through journals and books, and attend conferences where we share ideas. Our professional networks are important to us for our work and sometimes even as a basis for forming friendships.

One of the most useful strategy tools for building a professional network is to join one or more tourism research associations (see Web Resources below for a list of URLs). These are virtual scientific communities (Xiao, 2007) that link researchers with each other and promote research. Most have annual conferences at which researchers present and hear about the latest research; some associations have regional chapters, hold workshops and provide opportunities for researchers to network. Many have student membership categories with reduced membership rates. Joining an association as a student can help you develop contacts that might facilitate job searching as well as give you an opportunity to make presentations that help build your CV.

Tourism research is a rewarding and enjoyable activity, whether in a business, government or non-governmental agency, consultancy or university. The following chapters will provide you with valuable skills to help you conduct useful and high-quality tourism research.

Case Study 1.1. The evolution of an operational definition of tourism.

Tourism, like many social phenomena, is both real and 'constructed'. Tourism trips are a real phenomenon, but which trips we decide to label as 'tourism' is a matter of convention and, to a degree, arbitrary. For example, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines tourism in terms of trips 'outside the usual environment'. While this phrase may sound reasonable, there is no consensus on what constitutes 'outside the usual environment'. Operational definitions of 'usual environment' often are the result of historical accident or convenience rather than of any objective process. This case study describes the evolution of Canada's concept of 'usual environment' as an illustration of how the definition of tourism is ultimately a 'constructed' concept rather than one that has an independent, objective existence.

Canada debuted as a major international destination in 1967 with the success of Expo'67, one of the most heavily attended World's Fairs in history. Following the success of that event, the federal government realized that: (i) tourism offered significant economic opportunities for the nation; and (ii) there was very little information on Canadians' travel patterns. This recognition led, in 1971, to the first national survey of domestic travel patterns. The survey was conducted by the Canadian Government Office of Tourism (CGOT) in consultation with the ten provincial governments. At the request of seven of the ten provinces, CGOT used 25 miles (40 km) as the minimum travel distance; for the other three (following the practice of the contemporaneous US Travel Survey) CGOT used 100 miles (160 km). While the individual provinces could use their results for their own purposes, the lack of a consistent definition prevented meaningful comparisons across the country. The survey was repeated in 1977 with a standard threshold for all provinces of 100 miles. After another lapse of 3 years, Transport Canada, who had been conducting a 'Travel-to-Work Survey' since 1973, conducted a national survey of tourism patterns using a threshold of 50 miles (80 km).

The 50-mile threshold was selected because the 'travel-to-work' survey examined all travel less than 50 miles 'including travel to work, automobile usage, and other aspects of the trip' (Statistics Canada, 1977, p. 8). In 1977, discussions were conducted between Transport Canada and CGOT to determine what distance threshold should be used to separate the scope of the 'travel to work' survey and the tourism survey. Transport Canada suggested that a maximum of 50 miles for its travel-to-work survey would pick up virtually all commuters and that anyone making a longer trip was probably engaged in tourism. CGOT was 'not sure what definition [was] the best since some provinces [were] using definitions such as "overnight stay" [while others were using] 25 miles'. CGOT concluded that it did 'not have any specific objection to the 50 miles definition' (Statistics Canada, 1977, p. 9). Both sponsors ultimately agreed that 'the 50 mile limit was acceptable because, at

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Case Study 1.1. Continued.

this distance, comparisons with other surveys and existing sets of data could be done' (Statistics Canada, 1980, p. 4).

In 1984, Statistics Canada formed the National Task Force on Tourism Data. The mandate of the Task Force was to recommend improvements in the collection and analysis of tourism data for provincial and federal tourism policy, planning and marketing decisions. Among the issues considered by the Task Force was the magnitude of the distance threshold to define tourism. The Task Force heard that there was still disagreement about the use of 80 km. The province of Ontario, most notably, pressed for a return to 40 km. Ontario wanted this shorter distance to capture data on trips by residents of Toronto (the largest city in Canada) to nearby resorts and attractions. There was, however, little support from other provinces and federal agencies to move away from 80 km as a national standard.

At this time, the survey used to collect statistics on travel by Canadians was named the Canadian Travel Survey (CTS), and was paid for by the provinces. The CTS was operated as an add-on to a larger social survey, the Labour Force Survey (LFS), that collected monthly data on a wide variety of variables related to employment and households. The CTS was administered as a subset of the LFS – about 85,000 surveys per year.

As a compromise, the Task Force (Canadian National Task Force on Tourism Data, 1987) suggested that Statistics Canada collect data on all trips and report them using a standard range of distances. In 1988, Statistics Canada implemented a version of this recommendation: data on all overnight trips were collected regardless of distance; data on same-day trips of 40 km or more were also collected. However, only data for trips 80 km or longer (whether overnight or same-day) were used for official tabulations. In 1992, in a cost-saving move, Statistics Canada began collecting data only on same-day trips of 80 km or more, with the exception of same-day travel by Ontario residents. The additional cost of collecting data for 40–70 km same-day trips was paid for by the government of Ontario so it could obtain these special tabulations.

The Task Force also recommended the development of a Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) (see [Focus Box 1.1](#)). The TSA was based on tourism statistics utilizing the 80 km threshold. The investment of substantial time and money into the TSA reinforced the desire of many statisticians to stay with 80 km as the standard. None the less, in 1999, the province of Ontario once again pressed for cutting the threshold to 40 km. This particular proposal was made to the Research Committee of the Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC). The Committee examined the implications and costs of such a change. The arguments for reducing the distance threshold were that: (i) the shorter distance would allow the collection of statistics on trips to events and attractions near major cities; and (ii) all provinces, including Ontario, and the federal government would use a common definition.

The arguments against the change included: (i) the loss of 15 years of time series data; (ii) the recognition that cutting the distance threshold would increase the number

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Case Study 1.1. Continued.

of trips and tourism revenues by such an amount that the change would look self-serving and thus undermine the credibility of tourism statistics; (iii) the belief that a high percentage of the 40–79 km trips would include routine visits that were not consistent with the spirit of the UNWTO definition of tourism; and (iv) the inclusion of these trips would introduce a large number of low-value, routine trips unaffected by domestic tourism marketing initiatives into the performance assessment of the CTC's domestic marketing programme.

After a year's debate during which no consensus emerged, the CTC Research Committee referred the question to the CTC Board of Directors for a decision. The referral was partly due to the inability to reach a consensus but even more so because it was recognized that the question of an operational definition of tourism was more a policy question than a research question. In other words, the Research Committee recognized that tourism is subject to different definitions depending on who is making the definition and the purposes to which they apply the definition. Any national definition to be used by the sector at large should be made by a national body representing the leaders of the sector. Furthermore, the Committee was aware of the importance that federal and provincial governments use the same definition to ensure comparability in reporting the performance of tourism. Achieving consistency requires agreement among the opinion makers and leading decision makers in the sector, not just researchers who hold relatively junior positions in provincial and federal tourism departments.

The CTC Board of Directors agreed that the question of a national tourism definition was fundamentally a policy one and consented to consider the matter. After a presentation of arguments pro and con, the Board affirmed the continued use of 80 km as the threshold for defining both same-day and overnight tourism trips.

Independent of the issue of definitions, though, complaints about the LFS as the platform for delivering the CTS had been long standing. For example, tourism research managers in Canada's northern territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut) continued to be frustrated by the fact that the LFS did not cover their territories. The reason for this is that the territories have very small populations spread over a very large area, and sampling would be very costly. Furthermore, the LFS is prohibited from surveying First Nations (aboriginal communities), and a substantial portion of territory residents are aboriginal peoples. Another chronic complaint by provincial tourism researchers was that the LFS was not a travel-specific survey – approximately 40% of the people in the LFS did not take any overnight pleasure trips longer than 80 km in any given year. However, during 2000, changes to the administration of the LFS escalated frustrations. Most critical was the move to computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) for the administration of the LFS, combined with a shift from using a large number of locally based surveyors to a small number of surveyors in regional offices of Statistics

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Case Study 1.1. Continued.

Canada under the direct monitoring of their managers. Changes in the wording of questions in the telephone-based survey were also implemented.

These changes had little impact on the LFS data themselves, but they resulted in dramatic shifts in the data collected for the CTS. For example, some provinces noted a jump of up to 25% of total person-trips as a result of these changes. This was eventually traced to surveyors being more diligent about 'capturing' data on relatively short, routine trips, such as someone visiting a parent in a nearby city once a month – because their interviewing styles were now being closely monitored. Other forces resulting from other changes in the LFS created additional, unexpected shifts in the CTS data. As one analyst with Statistics Canada put it, 'when the LFS sneezes, the CTS catches pneumonia'. In other words, apparently minor changes in how the survey was administered undermined the provinces' confidence in the data they were receiving from the CTS.

This growing dissatisfaction eventually caused Statistics Canada to agree to explore alternative platforms for the CTS. The opening of this door then allowed requests for other changes to be introduced. Some of these were relatively minor, such as changing the minimum age of respondents from 15 in the LFS to 18 for the new travel survey and limiting questions to domestic trips only (some limited data on trips by Canadians to the USA were collected in the CTS). However, sensing an opportunity, Ontario (supported by some political allies) again pushed Statistics Canada to change the operational definition of tourism. Given the provinces' financial contributions to the CTS, it was difficult for Statistics Canada – as a client-oriented agency – to resist. Due to a change in the leadership of the CTC Research Committee, and having been frustrated by the rejection of the proposal for a change in the definition of tourism by the CTC Board of Directors, the provincial tourism research managers decided to circumvent the CTC Board of Directors and proceed without approval. The managers' argument was that the definition of tourism was only a technical matter, not a matter of policy.

A variety of potential definitions were explored, including the use of a 40 km threshold and subjective criteria such as trips taken 'out of town'. Sample surveys with alternative wordings were conducted, and respondents were debriefed afterwards by the consultant hired to test alternative definitions asking, in effect, 'If I were to have asked you [for example], "how many trips did you take away from home last month", would your answer have been different than to the question [on the test survey] "how many trips did you take out of town last month?" If so, how and why?' The results revealed that the specific words used could elicit very different interpretations (or misinterpretations) from respondents. For example, some respondents noted that they lived in rural areas, so the phrase 'out of town' meant nothing to them. They did not live in a town so they couldn't 'leave town'.

After months of testing, revisions and negotiations among the provinces, the CTC and Statistics Canada, a compromise was reached. As of 2005, the new definition of a tourism
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Case Study 1.1. Continued.

trip in Canada became: any non-routine overnight trip out of town or any non-routine same-day trip that is 40 km or longer. This definition became the core of a new national travel survey: Travel Survey of Residents of Canada (TSRC).

The compromise means that all provinces now use the same definition Ontario wished to use. However, problems remain. Confusion about the meaning of 'out of town' continues, particularly (but not exclusively) among rural respondents. The new definition also means that a 15-year time series on tourism trips was broken, and a new series begun. In turn, this not only means one cannot compare travel volumes and expenditures between years before and after the new definition, but the Canadian TSA had to be recalibrated using the new definition, which again breaks comparability across years (not to mention consumption of substantial human resources for recalibration). The full implications of the change have yet to be realized (at the time of this writing), but are likely to be substantial. The transition from the CTS to the TSRC took longer and cost more than anticipated. Indeed, the first data from the TSRC were delayed for 4 years, during which time government and industry had no current national or provincial tourism statistics, and had depleted budgets so that testing of the most recent version of the TSRC could not be done.

Incidentally, the search for a new platform for the TSRC ultimately was unsuccessful. After 2 years of work and over CAN\$2 million in research and testing, no acceptable alternative could be found. The primary alternative, random-digit dialling (RDD), was found to have problems, including cost and the difficulty of developing demographic profiles of the households contacted via RDD, that were more substantial than the problems with the LFS.

Whether a change from an empirical and unambiguous but arbitrary definition (80 km threshold) that did not have universal support to a political compromise based on a hybrid definition involving distance and the subjective and confusing notion of 'out of town', and the resulting financial and human resource costs as well as the loss of years of time series data, was a wise decision will be a judgement that future tourism researchers will make.

WEB RESOURCES

Links to tourism research associations:

- Asia-Pacific Tourism Association: <http://apta.asia/>
- Association for Tourism and Leisure Education: <http://www.atlas-euro.org/>
- Association d'Experts Scientifique du Tourisme: <http://www.aiest.org/>
- Council for Australasian Tourism and Hospitality Education: <http://cauthe.org/>
- International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education: <http://www.chrie.org>

- International Society of Travel and Tourism Educators: <http://istte.org/>
- Travel and Tourism Research Association: <http://www.ttra.com/>

Some views of the scientific method:

- Monty Python: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdVOZ8Gbf-c>
- Teman Cooke: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j12BBcKSgEQ>
- Myth Busters: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAC0NSFNBPQ&nohtml5=False>
- Richard Feynman: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYPapE-3FRw&nohtml5=False>

EXERCISES

- Pay attention to how other people use the word ‘theory’ and how they appear to be implicitly defining it.
- Check out the tourism research associations active in your nation or academic field. In what sorts of activities do they engage? Do they have student memberships or chapters? Are there some in your home country not on the web resources list?
- Identify the type of epistemology that appeals to you the most. Reflect on why it appeals to you.

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