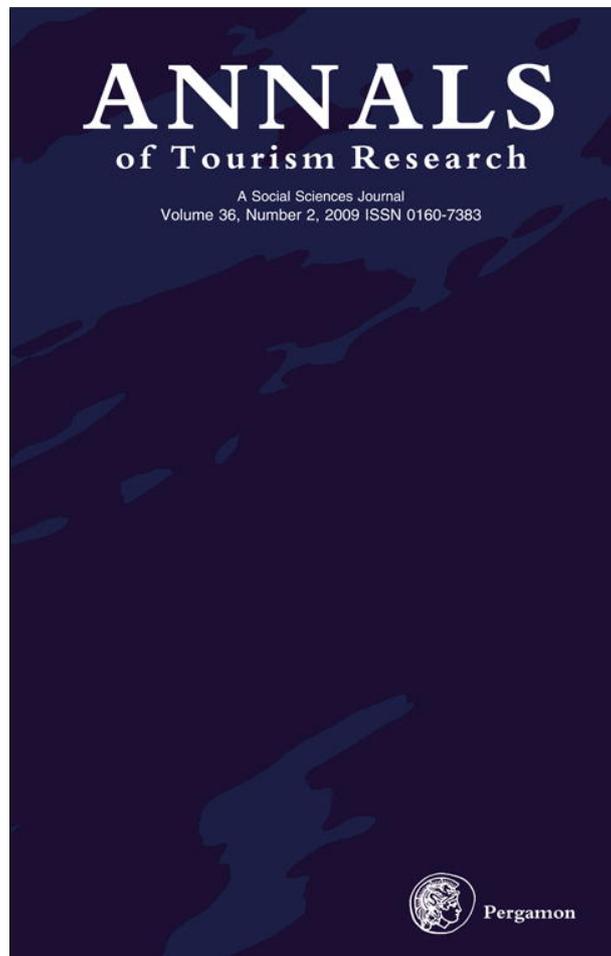


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ADVANCING UNDERSTANDINGS A Linguistic Approach to Tourism Epistemology

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Abstract: Arguing that considerations of knowledge development should reflect a conversational, human-based view of knowledge production, this paper proposes a linguistic approach to understanding tourism epistemology. It then introduces a framework for exploring knowledge progression that includes the components of tourism morphology, or the creation and adjustment of concepts and models; the production and promotion of new interpretations and understandings; and the employment of such interpretations for the purpose of problem solving oriented to the needs of practitioners and policymakers. The paper concludes that scholars should analyze epistemological progress not only to comprehend the development of ideas and interpretations, but also as an exercise in reflectivity regarding the influence of academic forces and trends that govern the process of knowledge production. **Keywords:** sociology of knowledge, epistemology, language. © 2009 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism studies is coming of age at a time when dramatic change is afoot in the broader domain of social research philosophy. Traditionally, social research existed largely under the sway of postpositivist philosophy, which holds the goal of research to be a systematic search for scientific truth. Thus, at one time it appeared easy to answer the question “How do we understand knowledge progression in social research?” Clearly, research was advancing if it was bringing us closer to truth, and clearly it was bringing us closer to truth if it met agreed upon standards of validity, reliability, generalizability, and so forth—standards which were, for the most part, borrowed wholesale from the “hard” sciences. The sweep of philosophical changes brought on by the resurgence of hermeneutics and critical theory-based approaches to knowledge production and by the development of

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postmodern and poststructural philosophies about the social world, however, has eroded the secure foundations of truth once taken for granted by “social scientists.” Echoing strains of reasoning about the subject in science that can be traced to early luminaries like Weber, Durkheim, and Marx, such “alternative paradigms”—which include interpretivism/constructivism (Gergen and Gergen 2003; Schwandt 2000; Bochner 2005), pragmatism (Noddings 2005), feminism (Oleson 2005), critical theory (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944; Kincheloe and McLaren 2002; Ladson-Billings and Donnor 2005), poststructuralism (Peters and Burbules 2004), and deliberative democratic theory (Howe 2003), among others—have argued forcefully that knowledge is a social product, created by communities of scholars that are governed by particular norms and traditions, and that notions of truth can not be disentangled from the broader realm of human interactions and power. In the study of tourism, Tribe (2006) captures this situation with his notion of the “knowledge force-field,” through which he argues that the path from tourism (the phenomenon under study) to tourism knowledge (the output of intellectual activities regarding the phenomenon of tourism) is mediated by factors traditionally considered to be “external” to science, such as researcher personhood and positionality, disciplinary norms, and broader societal ideologies. This conceptualization represents a break from traditional notions of scientific output as a neutral mirror of reality and exemplifies the way that social research disciplines and fields including tourism studies—albeit somewhat belatedly in comparison with other academic domains—are having to come to terms with the realities of knowledge production in a postfoundational world.

In light of this emerging intellectual milieu, in which—despite the continued presence of traditional postpositivist hegemonies—alternative and diverse understandings are increasingly finding voice, a fresh discussion on the issue of knowledge production in tourism studies seems warranted. After all, if scholars of the same field, who exist side by side in the same departments, can not agree on foundations for truth—if indeed they can not necessarily even agree on what it is they are doing, or what they should be doing, when they engage in the study of tourism—then how can they hope to understand the way knowledge unfolds in their field? Given the fragmented roots of tourism studies and the difficulty of gauging the impact of tourism scholarship on other scholarly literatures (Graburn and Jafari 1991; Harrison 2007; Jafari 2001; Leiper 2000; Tribe 1997; Xiao and Smith 2006), it is perhaps not possible to determine a single answer to the question of what constitutes knowledge progression in tourism. Nevertheless, as this paper suggests, it is worth pursuing understandings of how knowledge unfolds because doing so can contribute to scholars’ reflective capacity regarding the intellectual and educational products of the field. Epistemic inquiries about tourism studies also have important political implications, which stand as an additional valuable reason to pursue them.

Following in the discursive, relational, power-referenced philosophical traditions to knowledge production of scholars such as Nietzsche, Durkheim, Habermas, Mannheim, Bourdieu, Marx, Gramsci, Foucault,

Rorty, Sapir, and Whorf, this paper advocates for the consideration of tourism scholarship not as a linear search for truthful representation of reality, in keeping with any particular foundationalist scheme of evaluating knowledge progression, but as an institutionalized, norm-governed site of conversation in which interdisciplinary discourses about tourism are developed. In doing so, it engages a postfoundationalist epistemology. As opposed to foundationalist or objectivist epistemologies, which presume that knowledge is trustworthy and legitimate only when based on concrete foundations that “require no further justification or interpretation” (Schwandt 2007:120), this paper embraces the view that there is no secure agreement about what can be considered as a valid foundation for a knowledge claim in tourism studies because the field consists of heterogeneous philosophical (including methodological and ontological) perspectives.

Postfoundationalism has its roots in the antifoundational thoughts of Friedrich Nietzsche who advocated extreme skepticism toward any truth claim (Babette 1999; Baronov 2004). Generally speaking, Nietzsche argued that any given truth claim is no more than one ideologically driven way of representing reality, which is based on the intellectual act of imposing human reason to explain the phenomenon under investigation. Nietzsche thus negated any attempt to describe an ultimate reality in an objective manner and concluded that the goal of scientific research was to create language systems that metaphorically describe the world. This, he thought, was the only way that researchers, who view the world differently, would be able to communicate with each other. As shall become apparent, this approach to knowledge production is especially relevant to the epistemology of tourism studies due to the unique intellectual, historical, and administrative settings under which knowledge is produced in tourism.

In keeping with Nietzsche's logic, this paper assumes knowledge production to be a linguistic process—a complex negotiated communicative project, containing a multitude of paradigmatic, historical, methodological, and disciplinary influences—in which scholars from different backgrounds engage together (see also Chase 1956). This linguistic process is always conditioned by power, by the institutionalized setting under which it occurs, and by the rhetorical and textual constructions utilized by its producers. Arguing that the act of assessing progress in knowledge production in tourism studies should reflect this conversational, human-based view of knowledge production, this paper proposes a linguistic approach to understanding research progress that includes three guiding dimensions: *tourism morphology*, or the creation and adjustment of terms, concepts, metaphors, and models by tourism scholars; the production and promotion of new *interpretations* and understandings regarding tourism-related phenomena; and the employment of such interpretations for the purpose of *practical problem solving* oriented to the needs of practitioners and policymakers. The paper concludes that scholars should analyze development in the tourism studies literature not only to comprehend the movement of ideas and interpretations with regard to specific areas of subject matter and their utilizations in the real world, but also as an exercise in reflec-

tivity regarding the influence of academic forces and trends that govern the process of knowledge production in tourism.

TOURISM STUDIES AS A DISCURSIVE ARENA

The language-based approach to the study of tourism knowledge production suggested in this study is rooted in traditions and approaches that are generally classified under the rubric of “sociology of knowledge.” This section begins by briefly situating the paper in some of the key intellectual traditions within this subfield, and then surveys recent frameworks for understanding knowledge production in tourism that illustrate its postfoundational and conversational characteristics. It then introduces a three-part linguistic framework for understanding knowledge production and explores the dimensions of this approach in more detail. It is important to note that the purpose of this framework is not to provide a set of criteria for evaluating the quality of particular knowledge products in tourism; rather, it is meant to be a tool to understand tourism *epistemology*—to discern, on a conceptual level, how progress (or movement, if one prefers a term with more neutral connotations) occurs in the field.

Webs, Wars, and Other Metaphors for Understanding Knowledge Production

The hermeneutical tradition to scholarship has long argued that knowing is an interpretive act. Such an act is influenced by the characteristics and positionality of the knower, who is enmeshed in a complex social web of roles, heritages, experiences, and self-understandings. One of the earliest scholars to call attention to this issue was Emile Durkheim (for a critical discussion on his epistemology, see Rawls 1996). Durkheim viewed society as an entity consisting of social groups and held that the purpose of social inquiry was to advance understanding about the formations and functions of collective representation (e.g., economic, religious, moral, cultural). Accordingly, he argued that knowledge about society should start from social categories or social facts and that researchers should focus their attention on the relationships between these categories and humans. He thus rejected individualist approaches (e.g., classical empiricism) that championed the individual as the starting point for inquiry into social phenomena. A Durkheimian approach to knowledge progression in tourism studies might therefore center around the way that tourism scholars are influenced by their affiliations with particular classes, genders, religions, nationalities, disciplines, institutions, organizations, or research traditions, and he might turn the question of knowledge progress regarding the phenomenon of tourism *per se* around and argue that any development of our understanding of particular groups of tourism scholars (e.g., black male geographers of tourism, middle-aged lesbian sociologists of tourism), their formations, and their causes could be viewed as progress toward a better understanding of society.

More recent theorists have also emphasized the importance of the social web to knowledge production. Karl Mannheim (1952, 1959), who is to a great extent responsible for the emergence of sociology of knowledge as a distinct research area, sought in a much more comprehensive way to critically highlight the social conditions under which knowledge is produced. Mannheim advocated for empirically based research on human thought by looking at the influence of a wide range of variables on it, such as class, generation, status, profession, education, and so forth. In his celebrated study on German conservative thought (1959), he illustrated that opinions, assertions, and academic standpoints were all subject to the multidimensional positioning of their producers in society. In addition to emphasizing social, cultural, and ideological impacts on knowledge, in one of his essays, “The Problem of Generations” (1952), he further argued that knowledge and knowing are shaped by people’s major life events, especially those occurring in their adulthood.

Scholars also exist in a social web through the process of communicating their ideas and participating in building the canon of accepted knowledge. Pierre Bourdieu’s (1969) notion of the “intellectual field” insightfully expresses this dynamic. The intellectual field, according to Bourdieu, consists of agents (e.g., individual scholars, research centers, disciplines, etc.) that “compete for the right to define or co-define what shall count as intellectually established and culturally legitimate” (Ringer 1990:270). Bourdieu asserts that ideas, concepts, and knowledge can not be decontextualized from this field and must be understood in terms of their relationship with other ideas and concepts. In other words, Bourdieu highlights the dialectic nature of knowledge production.

As the previous scholars implicitly or explicitly recognized, however, identity and relationality are only one dimension of the picture; one will not go far in understanding knowledge production without considering the crucial issue of *power*. An obvious trailhead for embarking on an exploration of work in this vein is the oeuvre of Karl Marx who, as might be expected, stressed the role of class in the creation of knowledge. The crux of his approach to knowledge production and epistemic progress lies both in his categorization of society into an economic base and a cultural superstructure, and in his focus on class consciousness as a force that shapes human knowledge (Hamilton 1974; Lukács 1979). [Marx held academic knowledge to be part of society’s superstructure and, therefore, to be determined by the economic base (Hamilton 1974)]; thus, to understand the nature of knowledge, one should ask questions about the socioeconomic conditions under which it was produced.

Perhaps a more vivid way of conceptualizing this issue, however, lies in the work of the neo-Marxist scholar Antonio Gramsci, with his notion of hegemony and his metaphors of “war of maneuver” and “war of position” (Forgas 1988; Hall 1986). Gramsci rejected Marx’s base/superstructure dichotomy and argued that economics and class consciousness were not the only issues at the root of people’s allegiances. Rather, humans create and are subjected to a variety of social

forces (recall the social web discussed above). Thus, hegemonic formations (discursive or material) are not merely the outcome of successes and failures in groups' struggles over economic issues: they are collective, temporary, constructed alliances produced through the collision of ideologies about various social factors, including religion, race, national imaginaries, and so forth. As such, struggles for social change, at least for most of their active life, are less "wars of maneuver" (i.e., direct, frontal-attack revolutions) than "wars of position"—protracted struggles occurring simultaneously at many loci throughout society, where ideological allegiances are constructed and dissolved. For Gramsci, the academy was precisely such a site, and he viewed intellectual production as a process through which particular visions of society were advanced by interactions between individuals who themselves were subject to various ideological pressures by virtue of existing in the social web. Thus, for Marx, and for Gramsci and other neo-Marxists (e.g., Habermas 1968, Adorno and Horkheimer 1944), epistemic inquiries center on discerning the ideologies that knowledge products assume and/or seek to promote, and positive progress is achieved when knowledge provides new critical insights that contain emancipatory promise.

Finally, no discussion of theoretical work undergirding a linguistic approach to social research epistemology would be sufficient without considering the work of Michel Foucault (1966, 1972, 1980; see Rabinow 1984 and Peters and Burbules 2004 for discussions). Building on Nietzsche's work (discussed in this paper's introduction), Foucault was concerned, among other things, with the way that language and thought went hand-in-hand such that talking and reasoning about things helped to create the conditions under which they *could* logically be talked and reasoned about; in other words, he argued that logic and rationality do not exist a priori but are products of social discourses and institutions, such that different ways of looking at and dealing with a particular social issue can seem "rational" at different points in space and time, depending on external conditions. Much of his interest thus lay in tracing the ways that systems of utterances formed discursive webs that permitted particular ways of understanding the world and constrained others. Accordingly, his approach to epistemology was to trace the history of the way concepts, such as mental illness or punishment or sexuality, were talked and reasoned about—a task which he pursued with an historical orientation, like an archeologist going on a dig or a genealogist tracing a tree of ancestry.

Following in the traditions to the study of knowledge summarized here, and in line with Tribe's problematization of knowledge production in tourism studies, this paper holds that gauging knowledge progress in tourism studies is not a task by which one can or should simply evaluate "the extent to which there is a congruence between the theorized world of tourism (the canon of its knowledge) and its phenomenal world" (2006:360). Instead, it is suggested here that the epistemology of tourism should follow a language-based approach. Such an approach is also reflected in Tribe and Airey's (2007) book, in which they call for attention to the words used in the titles of

tourism-related books and conferences. The approach suggested here is also inspired by [Becher and Trowler's \(2001\)](#) cultural approach to the study of the academy. In short, they suggest viewing disciplines as tribes with shared cultural and linguistic attributes that help to maintain them as segregated academic clans. Although we hold that tourism studies is not a discipline but a discursive site with multiple disciplinary roots, our analysis demonstrates that the evaluation of epistemological progress in tourism can illuminate the cultural and linguistic characteristics of knowledge progress in this field.

Frameworks for Knowledge Production in Tourism Studies

Metaphors for knowledge production exist in the tourism literature as well, some of them with a rather postfoundationalist and/or linguistic bent, and a brief review of two that are particularly relevant to this paper's argument will additionally help to contextualize the current work. The first is [Jafari's \(2001\)](#) framework of understanding tourism scholarship as existing across four platforms. The *advocacy platform* is characterized by those who seek to highlight the positive impacts of tourism; the *cautionary platform* is represented by those who seek to critically highlight the social, cultural, economical, and environmental impacts of tourism; the *adaptancy platform* consists of the work of those who take the middle path and advocate a more responsible way of travel and of tourism development (e.g., community-based tourism,

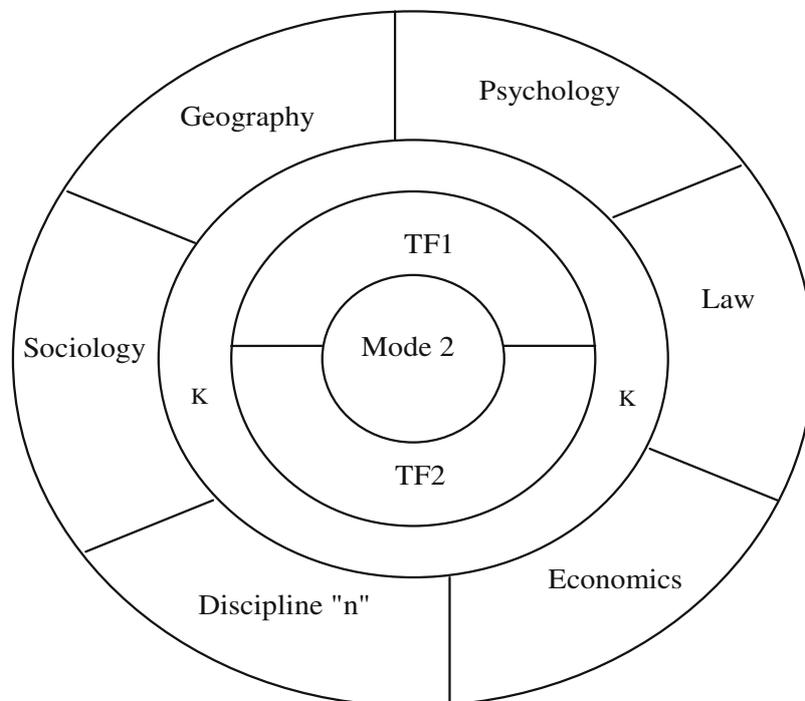


Figure 1. Tribe's Conceptualization of the Creation of Tourism Knowledge. Outer Circle = Disciplines and Subdisciplines; Middle Circle = Fields of Tourism; Inner Circle = World of Tourism; TF1 = Business Interdisciplinarity; TF2 = Non-Business-Related Tourism

ecotourism, controlled indigenous tourism, pro-poor tourism), which is more aware of and responsive to its potential negative impacts; and the *knowledge-based platform* involves the work primarily of academics, who attempt to form a scientific body of knowledge and “at the same time, maintain . . . bridges with the other three platforms” (Jafari 2001:32). Jafari’s analysis illustrates the relevance of the postfoundational perspective to the epistemology of tourism because it reflects the reality that various approaches to knowledge production in tourism, which rest on different foundational (or antifoundational) principles from one another, are in fact currently taking place.

The second framework that is useful in this context is Tribe’s (1997) figurative conceptualization of “The Creation of Tourism Knowledge” (see Figure 1), which metaphorically portrays both the interdisciplinary dynamics of tourism knowledge production and the transdisciplinary formation of the body of tourism knowledge. Tribe suggests that tourism academic scholarship is distilled and advanced in an imagined area (band k in Figure 1). This area exists between the established disciplines (e.g., Economics, Geography, Sociology, etc.) that serve as the conceptual resources of tourism scholarship and the twofold field of tourism studies: its business (TF1 in Figure 1) and non-business (TF2 in Figure 1) components. Principally, progress in tourism scholarship, which is the subject of this paper, takes place in band k.

Assessing the Development of Tourism Knowledge: A Linguistic Approach

Progress in tourism knowledge should be examined in accord with characteristics of tourism studies as an interdisciplinary discourse sustained by scholars across academic venues (e.g., in publications, at conferences, through personal communications). In keeping with this conceptualization, we propose three thematic dimensions for discussing epistemological progress in tourism. The first deals with the emergence of new linguistic tools/apparatuses and calls for a critical examination of the way tourism intellectual terminology is developed. The second involves the production of competing interpretations of tourism-related phenomena. The third relates to the application of tourism studies’ discursive products (e.g., models, concepts, theories) to problems outside the academic sphere (e.g., planning, marketing, management).

(1) Tourism Morphology and the Construction of Tourism Lingo.

In linguistics, the term morphology refers to the study of the formation of words in a given language. The approach to knowledge production employed in this paper assumes that social research is a communicative practice because any attempt to represent reality is mediated by language and the limitations set by textual construction. This assumption is reflected in the postfoundational epistemological conditions that govern the discursive arena of tourism studies, under which the development of common terminology, even if meanings are not totally shared by all actors, is a fundamentally important goal of the interdisciplinary study of tourism. Thus, the first dimension of

epistemological progress in tourism research relates to the composition of tourism lingo, or the linguistic toolkit of tourism studies.

A useful example of the epistemic importance of this practice is the integration of the word *community* in tourism studies, which can be traced to the work of Murphy (1985). Ever since Murphy's discussion of the importance of taking the local community into consideration in policymaking and planning for tourism development, this term has been employed in numerous studies and has enhanced the discussion on the relationship between tourism development and local people, cultures, and institutions. Taylor (1995), for example, participates in the rich discussion on community and tourism by criticizing the common assumption that community participation is possible, democratic, or required in tourism planning.

Another example can be found in the literature on tourism and authenticity. Since the early days of Boorstin (1964), MacCannell (1973), and Cohen (1979), the term *authenticity* has come to be used in various ways—ways which have sometimes even been considered to be conceptually contradictory to one another (Reisinger and Steiner 2006). Hence, much effort has been dedicated to disentangling the various uses of the term (see especially, Wang 1999), the use of which has been viewed as alternatively frustrating and fruitful (Reisinger and Steiner 2006; Belhassen and Caton 2006; Belhassen, Caton, and Stewart 2008). Through this process, *authenticity* and its entourage of qualified variants (e.g., “objective,” “existential”) has come to serve as a flashpoint for conversation about the broader issue of meaning-making in the tourism experience. The diverse and rich discussions that revolve around notions like *community* and *authenticity* in tourism studies thus illustrate that what is important is not the adherence of scholars to one particular definition or understanding of the role of concepts such as these in the world of tourism, but rather of the role of new and evolving terms as discursive anchors around which academic conversation can progress.

It is important to note that the creation and development of tourism lingo does not occur in a vacuum but must instead be understood in the wider context of tourism as a young area of study that is greatly influenced by other disciplines and research traditions. Thus, even the emergence of distinct vocabulary such as *destination branding* (e.g., Blain, Levy, and Ritchie 2005), *ecotourism* (Weaver 2001), *Grand Tour* (Towner 1985), *leakage effect* (Archer 2000), *multiplier effect* (Fletcher 2000), and *pro-poor tourism* (Hall 2007) should be understood in a wider context as an application of ideas, ideologies, and concepts from other disciplines, in which they were coined and developed. Tribe's band k (see Figure 1) figuratively portrays this imaginative domain where such dynamics occur. These terms, despite their different sources, help to create a body of tourism lingo that is reflected in scholarship and curricula. Thus, the development and promotion of tourism jargon, well reflected in thematic dictionaries and encyclopedias (e.g., Jafari 2001; Pizam 2005; Weaver 2001), should be viewed not only as an epistemological attempt to gather the terms with which students and scholars can communicate, but also as a political effort to enhance

the sense of community among those who study the world of tourism. And what can be more powerful and effective than creating a linguistic toolkit that is accepted by the community.

(2) *The Production of a Plurality of Interpretations.*

Whereas the first dimension of research progress stresses the role of scholarship as a linguistic device that enhances the sense of scholarly community, the second deals with the production of explanations in tourism studies. Researchers communicate their ideas with each other because they want to share and promote their understandings of reality. Thus, any scholarly work in tourism, no matter the research tradition with which it is affiliated, can be seen as an interpretation of some reality that researchers are seeking to advance in what Bourdieu (1969) might call the “intellectual field of tourism.” Such interpretations are never “pure descriptions” of reality; rather, they represent active sense-making on the part of the researcher, who serves as the information gatherer, constructor, and communicator of the meaning of that with which he/she engages (see Baronov (2004) for a discussion of hermeneutical epistemology, and Schwandt (2000) for an exploration of the notion of “philosophical hermeneutics,” which emphasizes knowledge as interpretation). As noted earlier, the dialectic dynamics as a whole within this intellectual field (or discursive arena, as it is termed in this study) are pan-philosophical and multidisciplinary, and hence lack a single agreed-upon foundation for basing knowledge claims. Thus, in short, in a field in which there is no one set of criteria for advancing claims, what researchers try to do is to produce an interpretation—to describe the world metaphorically in a way that they feel explains something about its workings.

Although scholars who do not consider themselves to be operating from such a hermeneutical epistemological position may argue that this notion of research progress is not generalizable to their work, this paper contends the opposite. No matter whether one is an empiricist, a postpositivist, an interpretivist, a constructivist, a critical theorist, an ethnographer, or a bearer of any combination of these or other scholarly identities, what he/she is actually doing in his/her research is using language and rhetorical means to make sense of the data and promote an interpretation of reality that seems logical based upon the evidence. Although postpositivists usually frame their interpretations in terms of causes, effects, and correlations and thus deconstruct reality into (dependent and independent) variables, and “interpretivist” research traditions generally focus on providing explanations about the contextual meaning of social actions that researchers observe, the basic components of evidence, interpretation, and communication are always present.

One problem with this view of knowledge production—from the perspective of humans, who generally like our questions to have solid answers—is that it raises the issue of how the quality of knowledge claims can be evaluated. Without a “truth standard,” what criteria are available to evaluate the superiority of one interpretation over another? Although arguments can be made for how to cope with this problem in practicality, from a purely theoretical perspective, it unfortunately

has no simple answer. Given the multiple methodologies employed in tourism studies, interpretative progress can take many forms. In addition, the power of any interpretation is generated from the contexts (e.g., empirical, theoretical, methodological) in which it is created. There is no answer that lies outside the human thought-web of tourism studies' discursive arena and the arguments of the conversational participants who populate it.

Thus, what happens in the “real world” of the academy is that tourism scholars attempt to persuade others of the value of their interpretations through such processes as peer-review for publication of knowledge, which involves using linguistic processes to convince fellow members of one's scholarly community that one's intellectual products have worth and make a contribution to problem solving, whether theoretical or practical, in the field. Depending on the norms, values, and beliefs operating in the scholarly community at a given time, some arguments will be more compelling than others. Many devices, such as journal ranking lists, impact factors (Jamal, Smith, and Watson 2008; Ryan 2005), appraisals of the impact of conferences on scholarship (see discussion in Drott 1994), and citation analyses (e.g., Xiao and Smith 2008), are then available to evaluate the popularity and usefulness of one interpretation over another, in given moments and over time.

(3) Practical Problem Solving and the Applicability of Scholarship.

The third dimension of progress in tourism studies, and perhaps the most popular one, is the application of scholarship for the purpose of solving practical problems faced by tourism planners, practitioners, and educators. Tribe's (1997) distinction between the three meanings of tourism as an external phenomenon in the real world (industry, places, events, etc.), as an area of scholarship, and as educational subject matter is pertinent in this context. The applicability dimension of tourism knowledge progression materializes when scholars attempt to address questions that are pertinent to the two other spheres of tourism: the industry (as broadly conceived) and the pedagogical practice of teaching tourism.

Linguistically, this process is usually characterized by the epistemic dynamics of borrowing previously created academic metaphors (e.g., models, frameworks, concepts, methodologies, definitions), and then adjusting them to the world of tourism for the purpose of solving a problem. An example of such progress can be found in the study of Reichel, Lowengart, and Milman (2000), who examine problems in service quality in the Israeli rural tourism market. By utilizing conceptualizations of service quality that suggest, for example, discerning between expected and experienced services (Grönroos 1990), and functional and technical factors of service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1994), they offer an exploratory analysis regarding the gap in service quality in this segment and suggest marketing and managerial means to improve these problems. Other examples of application-oriented progress in research deal with tourism planning, tourism education, and the many attempts to measure and control the economic, environmental, and social impacts of tourism.

Evaluating quality in the application domain of tourism studies is arguably a bit more concrete (although it is far from a contention-free issue). To the extent that particular metaphors for describing the world of tourism phenomena are effective in producing particular desired outcomes (e.g., poverty reduction, nature preservation, corporate profit)—and desired outcomes clearly vary dramatically, based on scholars, practitioners, and citizens' worldviews and values—such metaphors will be deemed more or less useful.

The popularity of application-based progress in tourism studies is a result of several factors, including the institutionalized settings under which tourism knowledge is produced and the larger political-economic frameworks of which these settings are a part. The affiliation of many tourism departments with business schools, for example, leads to an emphasis on applications related to producing, managing, and selling the tourism product (e.g., Jafari's (2001) first and third platforms). Similarly, the frequent inclusion of "service" and "community outreach" goals in the missions of universities support application-oriented approaches (in line, for example, with Jafari's (2001) second and third platforms). Financial pressures may also encourage application-oriented work, which can be done in exchange for contracts, and which may also be favored by particular grant providers (e.g., the United States' National Park Service). Similarly, researchers with teaching duties may develop action research-style projects for seminars that end up leading to the generation of knowledge useful for applications in tourism. Tourism curricula, which are typically characterized by the need to train future managers, clearly influence the trajectory of a significant portion of tourism scholarship (again, see Tribe's Figure 1).

CONCLUSION

The notion that tourism scholarship is a product of a discursive process is appealing because of its recognition of the centrality of human actors; few scholars of any stripe would disagree with the view that language, at the very least, mediates knowledge production (some, of course, would argue that it is constitutive of knowledge production). Because of its insistence that discursive actors operate with reference to external norms and conditions, which thus shape the output produced, such a conceptualization is particularly well-suited to dealing with the political dimensions of knowledge production in interdisciplinary fields, and it is often invoked for such purposes. However, a knowledge production as "norm-governed conversation" framework has other benefits as well. Recognizing epistemic output as the product of a conversation between thinkers working from different paradigmatic stances, with different values, beliefs, and goals, is arguably more democratic than are more narrow conceptualizations that view knowledge production as a search for truth, with truth (and acceptable means of searching for it) being defined in terms of one particular regime of thought, which happens to dominate at a particular time (Mannheim 1952). To make such an argument is not to claim that perfectly democratic outcomes will inevitably result, in tourism studies or

elsewhere: a simple look at the face of the tourism academy reveals many underrepresented voices and philosophies (e.g., [Ateljevic, Pritchard, and Morgan 2007](#); [Tribe 2006, 2008](#)). Rather, such a framework opens the door to the possibility of greater democracy because it overtly recognizes epistemic progress as a socially negotiated, dynamically produced outcome created by interactions among reasoning beings.

The framework offered here for understanding how research progresses in tourism studies seeks to move beyond narrow discussions of research quality. Such discussions clearly have their place: arguments about the appropriate use of a particular method or the proper interpretation of a given research outcome are useful because they allow scholars to think more deeply and critically about the knowledge products they create, and thus to produce more sound justifications for the value of their output for guiding problem-solving efforts in practice. However, as tourism studies becomes more established as a field—and a diverse and complex field it is—it is also important to consider notions of progress on a broader scale. The three dimensions of the framework proposed here thus aim to render the question of research progress easier for scholars to grapple with by identifying linguistic forms of advancement that cut across individual paradigms or areas of study. Such a framework can help to highlight important contributions that have previously been made to the literature, as well as areas that are in need of research attention.

The notion of a more democratic approach to judging research advancement is appealing on a moral level, but there is even more to recommend it than that. Arguably, epistemic value inheres in deliberative democracy. As many have argued elsewhere, democracy is valuable because it preserves plurality and, hence, the resources embedded in that plurality—in the diverse perspectives, approaches, and problem-solving experiences of the members of a democratic community. Such an outcome will not logically ensue if one imagines democracy as a rather blunt, majority-rules, winner-takes-all sort of system. Nor will it occur if one imagines democracy as a blank check—a sort of “let every flower bloom” approach that allows individual thinkers to retreat into their own understandings of the world without having to bear the burden of butting heads in the forum of ideas with their fellow scholars, who may view the world quite differently. But democracy as conceptualized here—as an ongoing, deliberative, and hopefully respectful conversation that involves different parties with different views and that emphasizes evidence and argumentation but also open-mindedness and questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions and intellectual power structures—would seem, at least theoretically, to hold resources for deepening and complexifying approaches to and understandings of tourism phenomena.

Scholars who engage in epistemology of social research often tend to emphasize the oppressive aspects of discursive formations (e.g., [Foucault 1972](#))—the way the reigning values, perspectives, and interests of the day shape human understandings of truth and logic in particular contexts, inevitably leading to the advantaging of some parties at the

expense of others. The dominant discourses in particular historical moments and spaces form the boundaries of how actors can make sense of things (Rorty 1989). They inform answers about how the world works by shaping the very questions that can be logically asked, as well as opinions about the best ways to approach answering them. What is less often seen, however, is how recognition of the discursive nature of knowledge production can function to improve society by inducing a sense of reflexivity in those who recognize such characterizations of power, language, knowledge, and truth operating in everyday practice. In this spirit, it is hoped that a framework for assessing research progress in tourism studies that is grounded in the idea of knowledge production as a negotiated conversation, and which reaches beyond narrow paradigmatic approaches to illuminate the multiple levels on which research contributions can be made, can help us to understand epistemic progress on a broader level and to recognize and preserve the value that lies in the field's diversity.

Any discussion on epistemological development can not be separated from the everyday level of administration (Foucault 1966, 1972, 1980; Mannheim 1959). Indeed, tourism departments that offer bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees need a sense of intellectual identity to enable them to provide programs at all levels. It would now be timely to examine the implications of such administrative issues for tourism epistemology. Future studies can begin by addressing several questions, including the following: Who has the power to determine whether research has advanced in a field with multidisciplinary sources? What knowledge products are considered to constitute epistemological progress, and when and how do they trickle down to curricula, position papers, and grant applications? How does the institutionalization of tourism studies influence knowledge production and advancement? These important questions are beyond the scope of this paper, but they should be pursued in the future because the implications of administration on knowledge production are undoubtedly far reaching.

As a final note, it is important to address the fact that, despite the development of tourism curricula, journals, conferences, and themed-based communities, tourism studies still faces a crisis of legitimacy. This issue is a political problem, not an epistemological one, and it should be acknowledged as such. Those who seek to promote and sustain the academic development of tourism studies as an arena of interdisciplinary inquiry should thus be informed by a political consciousness. Championing more democratic approaches to understanding knowledge progression is one strategy that can help the community of tourism scholars (broadly conceived) in pioneering the difficult task of developing a collective political consciousness—a task that should also include other measures, such as the promotion of transparent political discussions among scholars and graduate students regarding the problem of the field's legitimacy. Such discussions, especially perhaps with PhD students, can promote the idea that academic tolerance and at least a minimal level of solidarity are existential requisites for the future. In an era when departments are being closed or are merging on

the grounds of lack of resources, tourism scholars from all branches should show solidarity, not necessarily on a theoretical or methodological basis, but certainly as a political tool against such sanctions. This paper suggests that in order to enable knowledge progression, it is necessary to maintain the academic conversation about tourism, a process which includes continuing to develop the tourism lingo, encouraging multiple interpretations of tourism realities, and fostering the creative transfer of such interpretations in order to solve practical problems.

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