RESEARCH NOTES AND REPORTS

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RESEARCH NOTES

Inciting the Sociological Imagination

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This essay suggests a theoretical framework through which scholars may better analyze some of the current and impending challenges facing tourism scholarship. The framework is inspired by Mills' (1959) book *The Sociological Imagination,* in which he attempts to delineate the goals and meanings of social research by trying to answer questions such as ''knowledge for what?'' and ''knowledge for whom?'' In so doing, Mills raises the issue of the moral foundation upon which social research should be conducted. He suggests that the academic endeavor of examining society should incorporate two perspectives—micro and macro—such that the personal problems faced by individuals can facilitate an understanding of public issues that call for research attention. More specifically, Mills argues that individuals' personal problems reflect and stem from large-scale issues of the society they live in. Consequently, he suggests that social scholars should bring these two levels of observation together. The present piece proposes that tourism researchers should incorporate Mills' framework into their work as part of their attempt to produce valuable social research that combines critical and ethical thinking with the need to produce knowledge ''for the industry.'' The ability to do so engenders a better understanding of society, termed by Mills as the sociological imagination or ''the capacity to shift from one perspective to another, and in the process to build up an adequate view of a total society and its components'' (1959:211).

The goals of scholarship can be contextualized within historical debates over the nature and purpose of intellectual labor. These debates are well illuminated through an examination of two ideal–typical notions of the role of the intellectual in society: as critic and as expert (Kramer 1996). In short, the view of the intellectual as critic considers the scholar in academia to be one who challenges and

questions the political powers and cultural assumptions of society, while the view of the intellectual as expert constructs scholars as specialized professionals who reinforce dominant ideologies and validate the existence of the modern university as a primary institution of knowledge production. Notably, the critic/expert dichotomy should not be construed as a literal indication of two existing and clearly defined oppositional schools of thought; but rather as a conceptual tool that permits an analytical entry into a discussion of the role of intellectuals in society. In line with Kramer, this essay proposes that society is best served when both the pursuit of disciplinary expertise and the exercise of criticism regarding current understandings of knowledge and power are prioritized as central elements of the intellectual endeavor. The academic field of tourism, however, is influenced and strongly related to the industry and prioritizes the ''expert'' style of research over critical thinking (Tribe 1997). An examination of tourism research from the perspective of Mills' dictum may illuminate the political economy of tourism as an academic field and an industry by revealing the power relations that constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources in tourism. As such, the suggested framework is in line with Macbeth (2005) who indicates the need to pay more attention to underlying values, attitudes, and impacts in the study and practice of tourism. To illustrate the applicability and relevance of Mills' dictum to scholarship, the remainder of this essay considers a handful of key challenges facing the travel industry.

As noted, Mills' dictum enables scholars to look at the field of tourism through a critical lens in order to question commonly assumed notions by considering individuals' personal problems as reflections of large-scale issues. A systematic way of applying the sociological imagination to challenges would involve examining the personal problems of each category of stakeholders involved, such as tourists, hosts, practitioners, and so on. Beginning with workers in tourism-related enterprises, for example, the personal problem of income shortage, which workers frequently face, could be one point of departure for socioeconomic research in these studies. Indepth descriptions of the lived experiences of employees in tourism businesses, as illustrated by the historic paper of Andrews (2005), or by the autoethnography of Ehrenreich (2001), who joined the life of poverty-level-wage workers including several in the tourism industry. Such a focus reveals the frustrations and personal problems of employees and gives voice to individuals who work in the industry. From a macro perspective, these problems can be connected by the inquirers to related public issues, such as the socioeconomic gap between hosts and guests, low average salaries, and indigenous land rights. An examination of such issues could lead scholars to initiate a refreshing discussion on the specific significance of the neoliberal ideology governing the global market in which tourism operates.

The environmental impacts of tourism represent another key challenge for using Mills' dictum. The relationship between tourism development and environmental concerns was encapsulated by Plog, who suggested more than 30 years ago that ''destination areas carry with them the potential seeds of their own destruction, as they allow themselves to become more commercialized and lose their qualities which originally attracted tourists'' (quoted in Butler 1980:6). Admittedly, scholars have already embraced an environmental discourse which influences the way the industry operates. The concept of sustainable development illustrates how ethical and critical thinking can become a practical tool in research if applied robustly. In line with previous focus on this matter, the employment of Mills' dictum allows the examination of environmental challenges from the perspective of host communities, which commonly suffer the personal problems of declining quality of environmental resources (such as

water, air, and landscape). Such explorations of local problems can then be used to catalyze broader discussions on shared environmental public issues needing to be addressed by scholars, practitioners, and local authorities. It should be noted that the social orientation of Mills's dictum may facilitate a discussion on the human dimension of environmental concerns, but cannot be regarded as a tool to detect environmental issues that have yet to impact the living experiences of individuals. The application of Mills' dictum could be applied in this context by connecting global concerns, such as climate change and its predicted ramifications (e.g., heat waves, droughts, rising sea levels, flash floods), to the lived experiences of tourists, practitioners, and host communities.

The final challenge used to illustrate the applicability of Mills' approach is technological in nature. From its inception, the industry has depended on technological innovations related to mobility. The phenomena of vacationing at seaside resorts in England in the 19th century (train travel), the development of the American motel business in the 60s (car travel), and the emergence of international travel (air travel), all exemplify how crucial the technological element has been to the development of tourism. Nowadays, the Internet has become a dominant medium through which tourism is promoted, marketed, and purchased. Therefore, it seems reasonable to argue that technological developments will continue to play a major role in this industry. One way to employ Mills' dictum is by paying attention to the way various stakeholders cope with the rapid technological changes that characterize contemporary society.

In conclusion, scholars willing to employ Mills' dictum to the study of tourism should start their investigations with the understanding that personal troubles cannot be resolved simply on the individual level; they must also be connected with public issues and vice versa. Such studies must thus integrate the micro perspective of individuals' personal troubles with the macro perspective of the broader public issues they reflect, in order to illuminate their multifaceted interrelations. The limited scope of this essay does not allow for a comprehensive examination of the challenges the tourism industry is currently facing. It does, however, provide a framework that may expand tourism scholars' analytical skills. **A**

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Concurrent Validity of the Sustainable Tourism Attitude Scale

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Over the past two decades, the academic community has put much emphasis on determining the antecedents of residents' support for tourism, attitudes towards its development, and, more recently, attitudes toward its *sustainability*. Since residents are considered an integral part of destination management, understanding their attitudes toward *sustainable tourism* is an important step in gaining public support. One of the pioneering studies conducted by Choi and Sirakaya (2005) developed the seven-factor Sustainable Tourism Attitudes Scale (SUSTAS) which is now to be validated using various data sets for its construct and predictive validities. The original 2005 scale contains seven factors: factor 1, perceived social cost of tourism, interpreted as residents' perceptions of adverse social and cultural changes of tourism activity; factor 2, environmental sustainability, centers around the protection of environmental resources for present and future generations; factor 3, long-term planning, delineates planning as a participatory and dynamic strategy to be used over time for achieving sustainability; factor 4, perceived economic benefits, developed to capture attitudes toward economic benefits and costs associated with tourism development; factor 5, community-centered economy, contains statements that capture residents' attitudes toward the use of local financial and human resources with the purpose of achieving economic autarky which in return might help empower community residents; factor 6, ensuring tourist satisfaction, captures the attitudes toward measurement and management of touristic satisfaction since it is crucial for the long-term economic viability, development, and success of tourism; and factor 7, maximizing community participation, captures the importance of residents' and stakeholder participation in planning and decisions.

SUSTAS appears to capture the fundamental tenets suggested by the extant literature. Its internal consistency in the original 2005 study was verified via reliability analyses (Cronbach's alpha was in the 0.78–0.95 range). Although the authors addressed some validity issues like content- and discriminant-validity with their scale, the attempt was limited to a sample of residents in a small town in the United States. Moreover, superior forms of validity (such as external- or predictive- or concurrent-validity) were not established.

This note is concerned with establishing a more stringent form of validity, namely, predictive validity or concurrent validity. Validity is one of the essential