

# Tourism Sciences or Tourism Studies? Implications for the Design and Content of Tourism Programming

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# Tourism Sciences or Tourism Studies ?

## Implications for the Design and Content of Tourism Programming

**J.R. Brent Ritchie, Lorn R. Sheehan and Seldjan Timur**

### PART I

#### Introduction

We regard this invitation to prepare a paper on the topic “Tourism Sciences or Tourism Studies” as both a privilege and a challenge. It is a privilege, in that it provides an opportunity to present a personal perspective on a topic that has been discussed and debated for some time, yet it is a challenge also, because there has been only a modest resolution of the issues involved. However, to believe that we can bring anything that is new, or of a substantive nature—simply because we have been asked to do so—is indeed an assertion of questionable value. However, as the winner of the UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization) Ulysses Award for “Scientific Contribution to the Theory and Practice of Tourism Policy and Destination Management”, I hope that we may have something of value to contribute to the ongoing debate on the topic.

While it is still with some reticence that we now seek to address the topic, we hope that readers will find the following thoughts to be of value.

#### Tourism Sciences or Tourism Studies: What Is(Are) the Issue(s)

Our first step in seeking to address the topic of tourism science or tourism studies was to ask the coordinator of this special issue of *Téoros* for his perspectives on the rationale for commissioning this topic. He very kindly provided us with the following statement:

The topic of establishing tourism as a science affirms itself by creating university programs, specialized journals and newspapers, and specialized international associations. However, it is important to know if tourism training and research are adapted to the needs of the professional business environment.<sup>1</sup> (Kadri, 2007)

One might interpret the foregoing to mean that our responsibility as university level developers of tourism programs is to ensure that we must be training and/or educating our students primarily to meet the needs of business. However, we believe that the word “professional” should be interpreted more broadly. This interpretation leads us to conclude that we should be training and educating our students for both the professional and the business communities—where “professional” conveys the message that we are responsible for taking a perspective that is broader than business alone—, but one that certainly includes business.

Allow us to conclude from the foregoing that it may be logical to envisage two main-streams of tourism programming: a “science stream” that seeks to prepare consultants, researchers, and academics to function effectively in their respective careers; and a “management stream” that, as the name implies, includes studies on both the content and the processes that are necessary for the effective management of tourism destinations.

In our view, the overall purpose of tourism science programs is to comprehensively educate students about tourism and the science of tourism. In educating students about tourism, we must ensure they have, at a minimum, a thorough, rigorous, comprehensive understanding of:

- the motivations and behaviours of the tourist;
- the range and types of tourism experiences that individuals and organizations seek when visiting a destination;
- the range of impacts that tourists can have on a tourism destination;
- the range of benefits that successful tourism can bring to a society;
- the nature, content, and structure of tourism knowledge, as reflected by the content of existing university programs, specialized journals in the field, and specialized international associations;
- the different kinds of organizational structures that exist, or should exist, at all levels, to effectively manage the phenomenon of tourism;
- the contributions to tourism knowledge, in the form of theories and models from existing scientific and social literature.

#### “Tourism Science” Programs—Fundamentals of Tourism, Theory in Tourism, or a Theory of Tourism

In this part of the paper, we argue that tourism science programs should initially be focussed on providing the student with a solid understanding of the basics of tourism, followed by an examination of the theoretical foundations of tourism; that is, an understanding of those theories that help us to better understand the complex phenomenon we call tourism. In what follows, we shall provide a selected overview of the various concepts and theories that consultants, researchers, and academics should comprehend if they wish to be competent in their jobs. The reader who





## Theory and Tourism

One issue that individuals who wish to examine tourism at a more intellectual level must address, is the meaning of theory, both in general and as it applies specifically to tourism concerns. Accordingly, the first section of this paper provides a brief overview of both the philosophical and operational meanings of theory. Mainstream views of theory are outlined, followed by the authors' thoughts regarding practical implications for researchers and others seeking to build new knowledge. This section of the paper necessarily involves discussions related to tourism research and tourism as a discipline. Based on the foregoing discussions, the authors provide some views on theory in relation to tourism—and some broad-based guidance to those seeking to differentiate tourism theory from that of other disciplines that appear in tourism journals.

## What is Theory?

The views of several mainstream writers on the subject of theory are not akin. For Karl Popper (1998), a theory must be refutable, testable, or falsifiable. Paul R. Thagard (1998) agrees with Popper that theories must be falsifiable, but also adds another criterion—namely that a theory must be verifiable through observation. Once a theory has been verified, it can only be supplanted by a better theory. A better theory, which, according to Thagard (1998: 71), has to be more progressive in the sense that it solves more problems or explains more facts.

Thomas Kuhn (1998: 436) outlined the characteristics of a good scientific theory as follows:

- it should be accurate within its domain;
- it should be consistent within itself and with other accepted theories that are related to the same phenomena;
- it should have broad scope with explanations that go beyond those it was initially used to explain;
- it should be simple and make sense of seemingly disparate parts; and
- it should be fruitful of new research findings.

Rudolph Carnap (1998), in making a distinction between theoretical laws<sup>2</sup> and empirical laws, claims that theoretical laws are only able to be confirmed in an indirect

sense through the testing and direct confirmation of the empirical laws that they explain. For him, the value in a theory lies in its ability not only to explain existing empirical laws but also to predict new empirical laws. Imre Lakatos (1998) seems to follow R. Carnap by conceptualizing theory as an immutable hard-core idea or set of ideas that is not testable empirically. Surrounding the theoretical core is a protective belt of empirical laws that are testable, directly refutable, and that may change or be discarded based on empirical findings.

Richard P. Bagozzi (1984) highlights the need to pay attention to both process and structure in the construction of a theory. The process of theory construction requires attention to history in the sense that a new theory is judged by its ability to subsume older theories. Process also includes a theory's ability to explain current anomalies (*i.e.* those not explained by the prevailing theories) and lead to future discoveries. He postulates that there is a proper structure that applies to the construction of any theory. The structure must appropriately link theory to observation through correspondence rules. Hence the need for the conjunction of theory (T), correspondence rules (C), and observation (O), or TCO. R.P. Bagozzi further emphasizes the need to ensure that correspondence rules appropriately link theoretical terms to observation terms. Without such rules, it is impossible to assess the meaning of a theory.

Ronald N. Giere (1988: 86) defines theory as “comprising two elements: (1) a population of models, and (2) various hypotheses linking those models with systems in the real world. Such links are not like correspondence rules linking terms with the things or terms with other terms. Rather, they are relations of similarity between a whole model and some real system. A real system is identified as being similar to one of the models.

## What is a Model?

At this stage it may be useful to differentiate a model from a theory. Many authors tend to use these notions interchangeably. While the two terms are obviously closely related, Imre Lakatos (1998: 194) defines a model as “a set of initial conditions (possibly together with some of the observational theories) which one knows is bound to be replaced during the further development of the

[research] programme, and one even knows, more or less, how.” In this sense a model seems to be an appropriate and natural precursor to a theory. Paul S. Maxim (1999: 27) argues that quantitatively-oriented researchers opted for the term “model” to describe their theory statements. He noted also that “model” is a distinct and far less encompassing term than “theory.”

## Summary

What, after reviewing the thoughts of the above authors, may be concluded about theory? E.D. Klemke, Robert Hollinger, and David Wyss Rudge (1998: 310) provide useful remarks that may serve as a summary. They assert that theories:

- are sets of statements, some of which state laws, while others are singular factual or existential claims;
- contain terms referring to unobservable entities or properties;
- exhibit generality or comprehensiveness;
- have explanatory and predictive power;
- unify diverse phenomena and laws;
- explain not one phenomena or law but many; and
- aim at a deep understanding of phenomena.

Gayle Jennings (2001: 34) also provides a summary of theoretical terminology that we find very helpful .

**Table 1**

### Summary of Terms and Their Definitions

TERM	DEFINITION
Paradigm	A set of beliefs
Ontology	The nature of reality
Epistemology	The relationship between the researcher and the subjects/objects
Methodology	The set of guidelines for conducting research
Method	The tools for data collection and analysis

Source: Jennings (2001: 34).



## Implications for a Theory of Tourism

The phenomenon known as tourism was formally discovered by social scientists in the early 1970s (Dann *et al.*, 1988) and is now being studied from the perspective of a multiplicity of disciplines. Some authors (Jovicic 1988; Leiper 1981) argue that tourism has emerged (or should emerge) as a discipline in its own right. These authors assert that tourism must be viewed in a holistic sense rather than through a disciplinary lens. Others, however, such as John Tribe (1997), argue that tourism researchers have failed to pass several authors' tests of what qualifies a field of inquiry to be considered a discipline.

Everyone comes from somewhere. Tourism has been the subject of study of academics hailing from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. Each researcher has, not surprisingly, viewed (and arguably defined) tourism using a conceptual framework drawn from their academic discipline. Graham Dann and Erik Cohen (1991: 167) assert that no all-embracing theory of tourism exists because "tourism, like any other field of human endeavor, is a target field," simply providing fodder for the theoretical approaches of other disciplines. Disciplinary backgrounds that have been applied to tourism are as diverse as ecology and economics. Jafar Jafari and J.R. Brent Ritchie (1981) describe the broad range of disciplines (21) from which tourism has been examined.

Roy C. Buck (1978: 110) suggests that tourism scholarship is organized into two distinct and relatively isolated camps. One camp of researchers is focused on the business problems in organizing the economic development of tourism as an industry, while the other camp is concerned with the negative externalities of tourism activity on culture, society, and the environment. He claims that these camps tend to develop oversimplified views of tourism that do not include perspectives beyond their boundaries.

Erik Cohen (1979: 31), in his seminal work on the sociology of tourism, indicates that unifying tourism as a field of study is not a general theory of tourism but rather a "set of empirical characteristics marking off touristic from other types of social phenomena." He further notes that the boundaries between tourism and related fields of inquiry are not

clear and deal with a range of transitional phenomena. However, he leaves the task of understanding such transitional phenomena to others.

Zivodin Jovicic (1988) argues for an integrated theory of tourism. However, even well developed disciplines such as physics and chemistry are not adequately characterized by a single theory. Rather, they are characterized by a variety of interrelated theories that are unified by the phenomena that they attempt to understand. Therefore, his argument for an integrated theory of tourism might be viewed as being too optimistic, given the nature of theory in other more mature disciplines.

Adee Athiyaman (1997) criticizes many tourism researchers (especially those conducting tourism demand studies) of not contributing to the development of theoretical knowledge. As he sees it, they have ignored (or are ignorant of) the theory development process.

Robert Dubin (1976) describes the theory building process as involving four steps: (1) the identification of variables, 2) the specification of relationships (laws of interaction), 3) the specification of boundary conditions, and 4) the specification of system state. It is only after going through these steps that the researcher can begin to pose questions of the theory of interest. While this progression makes sense, it seems that the reality of tourism theory building might be better reflected by the above four elements arranged within the context of a pathless model,

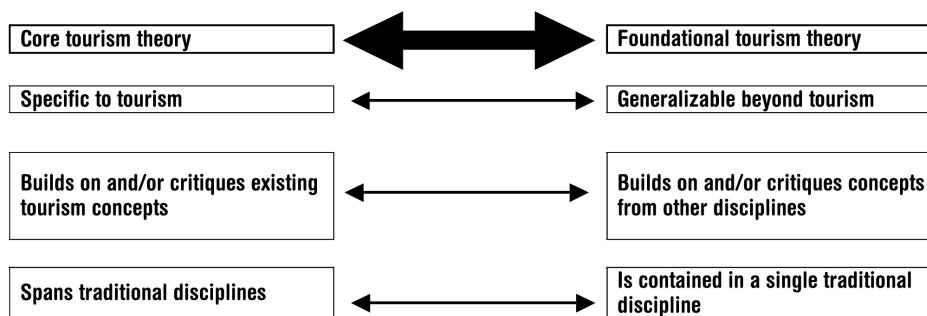
whereby steps are repeated (not necessarily in order) to arrive closer and closer to a (perhaps inter-subjectively shared)<sup>3</sup> theory.

Erik Cohen (1979) comments that there existed (at that time) a significant gap between abstract theory and empirical research in tourism. He believes that there is no point looking for the theoretical approach to tourism. Rather, he advocates a middle ground between a unifying theory of tourism and *ad hoc* investigations of discrete empirical problems—a common style of investigation that facilitates continuity and generalization of research findings (1979: 32). It should be noted that his views of tourism are specifically aimed at the sociology of tourism. This implies even more pessimism about the likelihood of obtaining a theory of tourism that explains a broader conceptualization of the phenomenon (*i.e.* beyond sociology) that would require the agreement (support) of researchers from a greater range of disciplinary backgrounds.

Since tourism is affected by, and is a product of, the diverse forces present in society, an all-encompassing theory of tourism will involve many components, and will necessarily lie at the intersections of the multiple disciplines involved in the examination of society, business, culture, and the biophysical environment. An initial approach by Robert Christie Mill and Alastair M. Morrison (1985) attempts to conceptualize a "tourism system." A more recent approach advanced by J.R. Brent Ritchie and Geoffrey I. Crouch (2000), which focuses on understanding the factors influencing the performance, and ul-

Figure 2

A Core-foundational Model of Tourism Theory That Provides Key Characteristics of a Continuum That Differentiates Core from Foundational Tourism Theory and Research



Source: Adapted from Jafar Jafari, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Study of Tourism: Choices of Discipline and Approach.



timately, determining the “success” of the “tourism destination,” appears to provide a comprehensive alternative.

### Differentiating Tourism Theory from Theory in Foundation Disciplines

Part of the problem that creates controversy over tourism as a field of inquiry or a discipline may be viewed as centring on defining what should be considered tourism theory (or what we call core tourism theory) versus what is theory from other disciplines (or what we call foundational theory for tourism); the latter being theory and research from other disciplines that focus on a topic related to tourism. Such distinction between core tourism theory and other foundational theory should be viewed as a continuum. Three key distinguishing characteristics can be used to separate core from foundational tourism theory (fig. 2).

The main characteristic that we believe distinguishes core from foundational theory is generalizability. Theory that is core to tourism is specific to tourism and not readily generalizable to other disciplines. Foundational tourism theory aims to develop generalizations beyond tourism (to another discipline). Although there may be instances where the theory in question makes contributions to both tourism and another discipline, there will be a much stronger contribution to one field versus the other.

The second characteristic has to do with the theory that is being built upon or critiqued. Theory that is core to tourism builds on or critiques existing core tourism theory. Foundational tourism theory, on the other hand, builds on or critiques theory from its own discipline.

The third characteristic concerns whether or not the theory is contained within a single traditional discipline. Core tourism theory is inherently discipline spanning while foundational theory is confined to one discipline.

The implications of the core-foundational continuum of tourism theory are several. First, because academics have traditionally hailed from foundation disciplines, they have knowledge of the theoretical constructs in these disciplines and find it relatively easy (especially methodologically focused researchers) to apply the constructs to tourism.

As a consequence, it is logical that most academics would have a preference to develop and test foundational theory rather than core tourism theory itself. In the same vein, many academics find that publications in tourism journals are less recognized within their institutions than publications in more traditional discipline journals. Finally, the core-foundational continuum implies that researchers interested in building core tourism theory should pursue research that is specific to tourism and that is inherently discipline-spanning. However, theory and research that is considered foundational may over time influence core theory in tourism to the extent that it is incorporated into their work by other core tourism theoreticians and researchers.

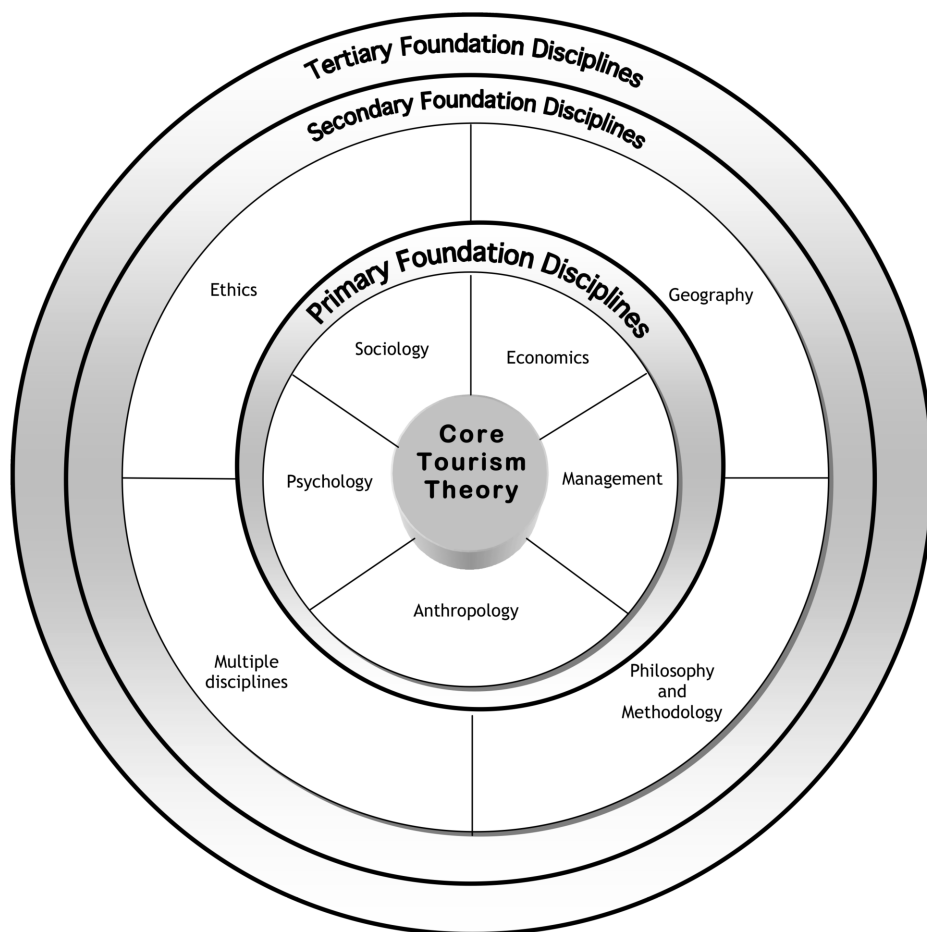
### A Conceptual Interpretation of the Interface Between Tourism Theory and its Foundation Disciplines

Based on the core-foundation model that is used to make a distinction between tourism theory and the theory of foundation disciplines, and the empirical findings of our analysis of tourism theory papers (with “theor” in the title or abstract) in the top three tourism journals, we now offer a conceptualization of tourism theory and its relationship to the theory of foundation disciplines. Our conceptual interpretation is illustrated in figure 3.

In figure 3, core tourism theory is immediately surrounded in the diagram by those primary foundation disciplines that were found in our

Figure 3

A Conceptual Interpretation of Core Tourism Theory and its Relationship to Theory in Other Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Foundation Disciplines as Distinguished by the Core-foundational Model of Tourism Theory



Source: Authors.



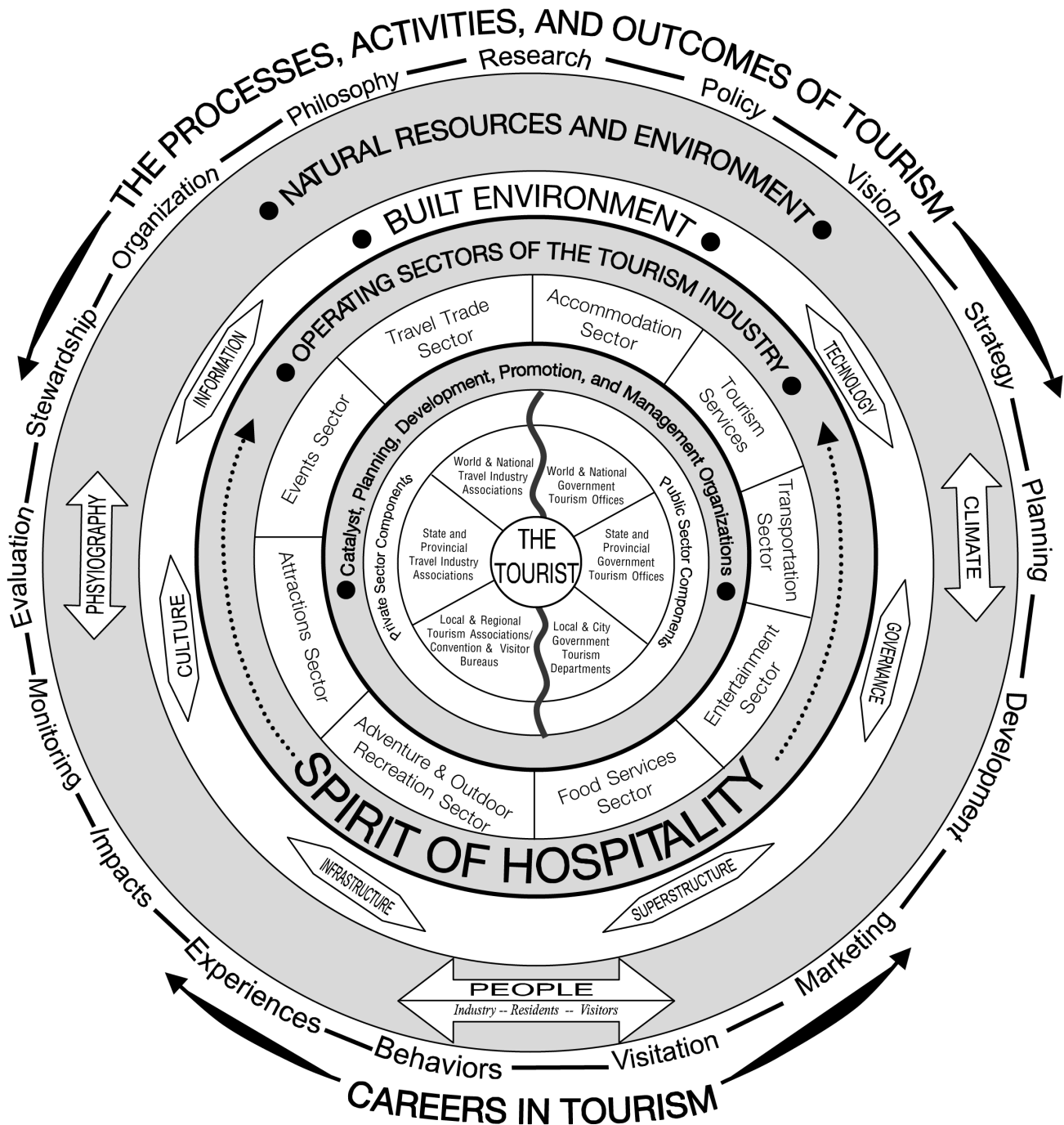
analysis to contribute the greatest number of theory articles in the top three tourism journals. The next circle, termed “secondary foundation disciplines,” includes those foundation disciplines that contributed a lesser, but

still meaningful number of articles. Finally, the outer circle, defined as “tertiary,” reflects those disciplines mentioned by other authors. Although it did not emerge strongly from our analysis, we believe that disciplines

in this category can still contribute significantly to our understanding of the phenomenon of tourism, especially over the longer term. As such, they need to be accommodated in the kind of conceptualization shown in figure 3.

Figure 4

Components of a Tourism Destination



Source: Goeldner and Ritchie (2006: 14).



Within each of the foundation disciplines we find very rich theoretical contributions. For example, the foundation discipline of economics has been used by authors to make theoretical contributions to tourism in areas such as demand models, economic impact models, and price elasticity. However leave the obvious task of further elaborating the theoretical contributions within each of the foundation disciplines. This will require an in-depth analysis of individual papers in order to identify the specific theories that are in fact being used. These findings could then be aggregated across the papers studied to identify the most prevalent disciplinary theories. A similar analysis might be applied to papers termed core tourism theory. Here the objective would also include identifying the nature of the components of core tourism theory.

*Tourism: Principles, Practices, Philosophies*, co-authored by Charles R. Goeldner and J.R. Brent Ritchie (2006). This text is generally regarded as a comprehensive introduction to the study of tourism, which, we believe, provides an appropriate balance between academic rigour and managerial relevance.

Since we have previously examined some of the theoretical foundations of tourism, we shall, in this section, turn to an examination of some of the more pragmatic aspects of tourism programming. These programs are essentially policy-oriented and managerial in nature. As such, they seek to draw upon the basic understanding of tourism that the theoretically-oriented science programs have provided, and translate them into the practical management of tourism.

natural environment for a given destination, it can be observed, studied, and understood in a holistic and integrated manner. One framework of “the destination,” which has been formulated to help identify and understand the components of the tourism destinations and the relationships among components, is given in figure 4.

As this framework is presented in C.R. Goeldner and J.R.B. Ritchie (2006: 14), the beginning scholar is referred to that source for a detailed discussion of each of the components of the destination, their manner of functioning, and the processes, activities, and outcomes of the tourism phenomenon.

Once a tourism destination is “in place” and functioning, the next challenge is to identify and effectively manage those factors that enable the destination to compete in the international marketplace—and, in so doing, achieve success—, thus enhancing the well-being of residents. One model that identifies these factors is given in figure 5. A detailed discussion of this model, the nature of its components, and the relationships among them, is contained in J.R. Brent Ritchie and Geoffrey I. Crouch (2003).

## PART II

### Tourism Studies Programming

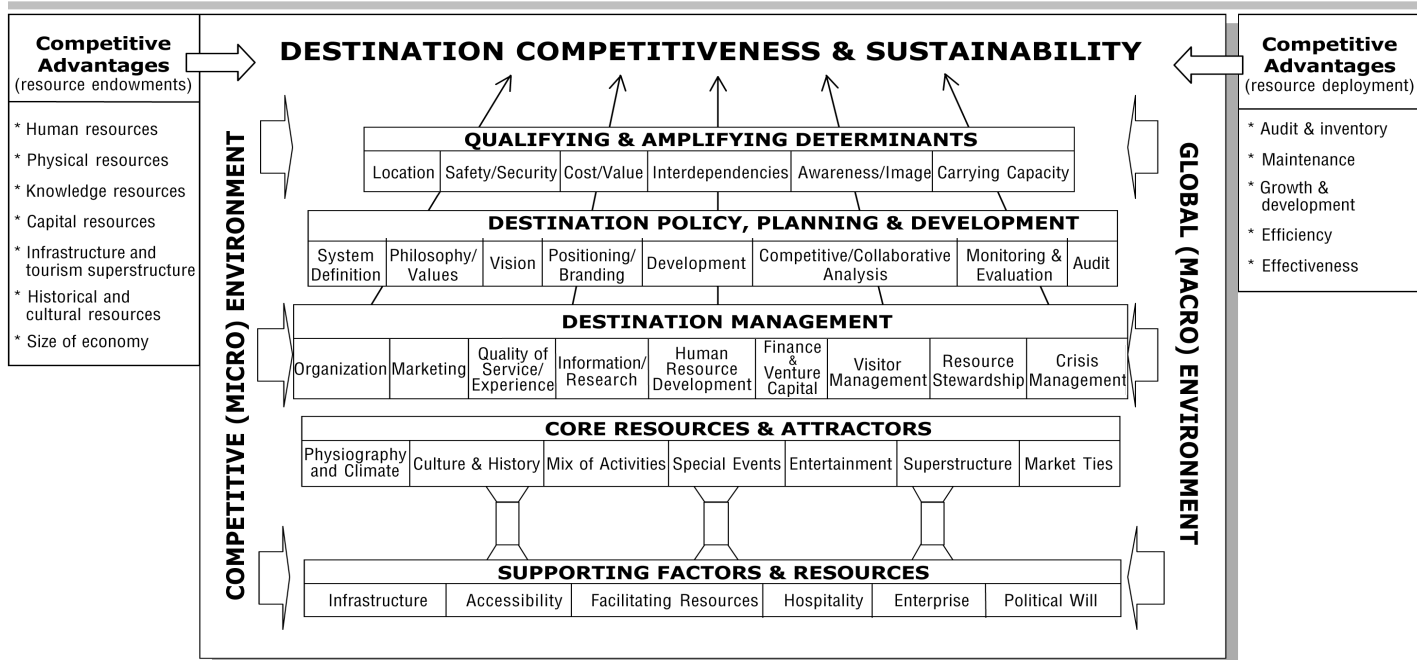
Now that we have demonstrated the importance of theory in providing a basis for understanding the complex multidisciplinary phenomenon of tourism, allow us, as an introduction to the pragmatic side of tourism studies, to encourage interested readers to examine a fundamental textbook, entitled

### The Unit of Study and Management Action

From both a theoretical and managerial perspectives, we have concluded—based on our analysis and reflections—that the most manageable primary unit for the study as well as the management of tourism, is the “destination.” Since this entity includes the totality of the cumulative interactions among tourists, hosts (including residents and suppliers), and the

Figure 5

Model of Destination Competitiveness and Sustainability



Source: Ritchie and Crouch (2003: 63).





### A Framework for Managerially-based Tourism Programming

As per the content of the foregoing discussion, one should not be surprised that the primary foundation, on which, and around which all of the University of Calgary (UofC) managerial programs are built, is the tourism destination. The one single course, into which all others feed, is entitled: "Tourism Research, Policy, Planning and Development."

The words in the title of this course have been carefully chosen to reflect the following: effective destination management should begin with / be based upon carefully designed and well executed research. In terms of design, destination research must always have as the centre of attention, none other than "The Tourist" (see fig. 4)—with a special emphasis on seeking to fully understand the nature of the experiences that the potential visitor is seeking. Secondly, the research must explore the ability of the destination to provide the kind of experience the visitor is seeking—with particular emphasis here being placed on identifying the major competitors that are capable of offering similar experiences.

Once the research program has given the destination the above insights on the tourist, the "policy" component of the course first requires the specification of system definitions. This component involves: the range of approaches that may be used to define different levels and types of tourism destinations and to identify the stakeholders who can help contribute to destination success, and subsequently establish their relative salience (*i.e.* importance in helping/hindering the destination) as it sets out to achieve success (see Sheehan and Ritchie, 2005).

The second component of policy is referred to as the destination philosophy; a statement that defines the kind of destination that residents wish the destination to be or to become. In brief, the destination philosophy sets out a general principle or set of principles that reflects the beliefs and values of residents of the destination, concerning how tourism should contribute to their well-being, and which acts as an ongoing guide for evaluating the utility and/or success of tourism-related activities within the boundaries of the destination.

The destination vision component of policy should reflect the foregoing philosophy—but be more definitive. It does so by setting out a series of statements that enunciate the ideal future of the destination for the next 20-50 years—in both functional and inspirational terms.

Finally, the two previous components of tourism policy provide the basis for formulating a destination brand; a statement setting forth a commitment by the destination to provide the kind and quality of experience it promises in its promotional material. While many destinations claim to have developed a "brand," most often in the form of a "tagline" for promotional materials, business cards, letterhead paper, and a web site, very few destinations have undertaken to determine how effectively their brand has performed—or to even define what constitutes good brand performance—or, even more fundamentally, to define the dimensions on which a brand should perform. While not yet fully evaluated, table 2 provides an initial identification of measures of destination

brand performance, adapted from J.R. Brent Ritchie and Robin J.B. Ritchie (1998).

Until now, this discussion of policy has focused almost exclusively on the manipulation of concepts. While intellectually stimulating and demanding, we must now move into the planning phase if we wish to translate policy into reality. However, since the planning phase of tourism programming is quite detailed, it is beyond our ability to discuss it within the limited space available here. Interested readers are referred to C. Michael Hall (2000) and Edward Inskeep (1991).

### Tourism Sciences or Tourism Studies—Some Concluding Remarks

When we were given the title of this paper—to be developed for this special issue of *Téoros*—, we felt a need to try and understand what purpose the Editors had in mind and how we might contribute to that purpose, within the space and resource limitations we had to respect.

Table 2

Measures of Destination Brand Performance

ROLE	MEASURE
SELECTION Sub-Components	The extent to which the destination is chosen over others
	Identification The degree of recognition/association
	Differentiation The lack of confusion with other destinations The lack of confusion with other products/services
	Anticipation The extent to which the brand generates a desire to visit the destination The intensity of the desire to visit that the brand generates
Expectation The nature and importance of the specific benefits the visitor expects to realize from the destination experience	
Reassurance The extent to which the brand provides a "cloud of comfort" for the visitor—a feeling that all is, or will go well during the destination visit	
RECOLLECTION Sub-Components	The ease, frequency, and strength of recall of the destination experience
	The extent to which the brand helps create memories of the destination and the visitor's experiences
	The intensity or warmth of memories elicited
	The degree of comfort provided that the future/current choice was/is a sound one
Consolidation The ability of the brand to serve as a catalyst to tie together the many "bits" of memory of the destination experience	
REINFORCEMENT The ability of the brand to "cement" a consolidated and coherent memory of the destination experience	
REGENERATION	The extent to which the brand regenerates word-of-mouth (WOM) enthusiasm and interest from past to potential visitors
	The frequency with which WOM regeneration occurs
	The breadth and scope of WOM regeneration among various types of market segments

Source: Adapted from Ritchie and Ritchie (1998: 108).



So, how did we respond? In brief, we have tried to review how the concepts of tourism science and tourism studies are reflected in the different components of our programming here at the University of Calgary.

Tourism science is reflected in the contents of a Ph.D. seminar on theory in tourism. In this regard, we have reviewed material from that seminar.

As for tourism studies, we acknowledge its importance throughout all our courses—and particularly within our capstone course on tourism policy, a fourth year course in our Bachelor of Hotel and Resort Management (BHRM), whose contents have been summarized and reviewed. As one would expect, the contents of this tourism policy course are intended to train future managers on how to enhance the competitiveness and the success of their destination and, as a consequence, to improve the well-being of destination residents.

To summarize:

Tourism science is designed to provide a theoretical understanding of tourism.

Tourism studies (as the applied study of tourism) are designed to enhance our ability to effectively manage the destination and, in doing so, enhance the well-being of the residents of a tourism destination.

It is hoped that the overview of the material we used to make the distinction between tourism science and tourism studies has been helpful. While we would have liked to provide much greater detail in order to make certain of our arguments more effective, we have faced fairly severe space limitations. We can only hope that we have still been able to convey the essence of our message.

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### Notes

- 1 E-mail communication of July 19, 2007 by Boualem Kadri, Université du Québec à Montréal.
- 2 For R. Carnap, empirical laws are those that can be confirmed (or not) directly through empirical observation. Theoretical laws, on the other hand, cannot be confirmed directly through observation.
- 3 Intersubjectively shared refers to a subjective belief that is held by more than one person. The usage here reflects the authors' admission that a tourism theory will likely never be "proven" true in an objective sense, but rather may be believed true by most researchers that find it consistent with empirically observed realities.

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